

THE LITTLE ANGEL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BLUE LION

THE PEAL OF BELLS

THE MONEY-BOX

THE ORANGE TREE

THE LITTLE ANGEL

A BOOK OF ESSAYS

BY
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("Y. Y.")



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I. The Little Angel



MANY people seem just now to be doing their best to make the world a good place for bad children. Never in the past, I fancy, has the bad child been placed on such a pedestal as he graces to-day. Time was, if the records do not deceive us, when he was put into the corner, slapped, turned out of the room, given no jam, and otherwise punished for what were then frowned on as his sins. If he was disobedient, his elders regarded this as a short-coming. If he lied or stole, he was looked on disapprovingly as a liar or a thief. If he bit and scratched, this was considered a declension from the idealism of the Fairchild family. If he pulled the cat's tail or killed flies for sport, he was told to stop. His very dirtiness was a subject for reproof. He was not incited by his elders to be greedy or mean or ill-mannered or cowardly or to put bent pins on chairs so that other small boys might sit down on them.

There was little encouragement for vice in the books of nursery rhymes and moral tales that were given him to read. Little Jack Horner, it is true, was treated by the poet with a certain tolerance, but Meddlesome Matty and Shock-headed Peter were presented as warnings, not as models, to the young. Since the days of

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Dr. Watts, indeed—and long before that—a naughty child was regarded as blameworthy; and most people assumed that it was quite as important to observe the Ten Commandments in the nursery as in the other rooms of the house. I do not know whether the sense of sin is innate in human beings, but in Victorian days it was certainly inculcated into children almost as soon as they had learned to walk. Many children were even taught that it was a sin to whistle or play games on Sunday, and the man in the moon, on his endless wanderings through the night sky, was pointed out by nurses as an example of a fellow-creature who had been punished for profaning the holy day. Our imaginations were at home in Hell, and we had very little doubt that we were daily doing something or other that merited an eternal stay among those intolerable flames.

Theoretically, we ought to have been very unhappy, and undoubtedly we had some gloomy moments as we anticipated our doom. I fancy, however, that, even in a world that was but the West End of Hell, only those children were very unhappy whose parents attempted to forestall the after-life by acting as the Devil's vicegerents in this. The religion of Hell made some people cruel, and parents of this kind attempted to save their children from punishment in the next world by punishing them savagely in this. I confess I have known few parents who

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behaved with this devilish logic. In most of the houses I knew as a child everybody believed in the existence of Hell as they believed in the existence of the United States of America. But, so far as I could see, this did not greatly interfere with their cheerfulness except on Sunday. They enjoyed good food, jokes, company, picnics, holidays at the sea, all but as much as if they had been of the school of Epicurus. They told happy lies to their children about Father Christmas, and heaped gifts on them on Christmas Day and on their birthdays. They believed that they themselves were miserable sinners and that their children were miserable sinners, all of whom deserved eternal torture, but meanwhile, even apart from the fact that anyone could escape his deserts who chose, why not enjoy roast goose and apple sauce? We knew that there would be no roast goose and apple sauce in Hell, but men and children live very little in the future, and the flames were too distant to shed their sinister gleam on the crowded table. In this mood did most of us live in a world in which children were regarded and were taught to regard themselves as miserable sinners.

Nowadays, it seems, everybody is for abolishing the custom of telling the child that it is a miserable sinner. Perhaps, indeed, the custom has fallen into desuetude of itself. However that may be, the psychologists and teachers

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have for some years past been giving it many a parting push, and have been turning all the old nursery morals topsy-turvy. According to the new morality, it is not the bad child (the miserable sinner who persists in being a sinner) but the good child (the miserable sinner who tries not to be a sinner) who is the really deplorable character. No longer must we hang on the nursery wall the coloured picture of the Infant Samuel as he listens for the divine voice. No longer must the ears of little children be polluted with the story of young George Washington and his unenterprising confession: "Father, I cannot tell a lie." As for Queen Victoria and the "I will be good" of her childhood, what a spiritless figure she seems in the light of the new psychology! Casabianca, too, who, though stupid almost to the point of imbecility, was a model of filial obedience, must now be banished from children's poetry books as an odious character. So at least I gather from a number of speeches delivered at a conference on child psychology at the Caxton Hall.

Dr. Hadfield put the new view in a sentence when he said: "If you have a child who is consistently angelic, take him to a doctor and see what's wrong"; and Dr. Elizabeth Sloan Chesser declared that "the goodness of the angelic child meant very often that he had no energy or spirit." Dr. Sloan Chesser also

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warmly defended children who told lies, and affirmed that "it was perfectly natural for a little child to tell what grown-ups call lies." Thus is the statue of George Washington broken in pieces. (I know that George Washington is now believed not to have cut down the cherry-tree at all, so that, if he said he did, he too must have been a liar. But I hold by the George Washington of tradition.) Dr. Sloan Chesser even went so far as to warn parents against reproving children for telling lies, since, "to tell a child he was lying was to bring about repression, and repression brought about conflicts and complexes which made for neurasthenia."

Any theory is good, I suppose, which will prevent the punitive kind of parent from taking the sins of the nursery too seriously. It is obvious to any sane human being that to punish a small child for lying or stealing or laziness as though he were a danger to society and a breeder of pestilence is mere cruelty disguised as morality. At the same time, it is open to doubt whether the old-fashioned child was in any considerable number of instances driven into neurasthenia by being told that it was fibbing. It is only the abnormally sensitive child that is so greatly perturbed as this on being convicted of sin. I knew a good many sturdy liars in my childhood whose parents, teachers and friends made no bones about letting

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them know that they were liars, but they did not seem to lead any the less cheerful lives on that account. It is, of course, impossible to make generalizations that will be applicable to all children. Even among the liars, there are some who lie gallantly and some who lie furtively and meanly. I have known boys without an ounce of vice in them who would lie like heroes, and I have known other boys who would lie like reptiles. I told some lies myself, but if I was ever on the verge of neurasthenia, it was not because I was found out and reprovved by a schoolmaster, but because I wasn't found out and was afraid I should be. Nor do I think that it did us much harm in other ways to be brought up in a code that put lying among the vices. Truthfulness, after all, is among the most radiant of the virtues, and, if we were taught to be ashamed of lying, no doubt we achieved truthfulness in consequence more often than we should otherwise have succeeded in doing. It may be impossible to put all morality into a series of prohibitions, and it may be that, when we have exhausted all the "Thou shalt nots," we are only at the beginning of the Christian virtues. "Thou shalt not," however, is a convenient formula for everyday use by those who, unable to invent a new morality, are anxious to pass on a reasonable amount of the traditional morality to their children.

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Undoubtedly, the ideal method of inculcating virtue is for the parent to be an angel himself, and to teach the laws of virtue, not by prohibitions, but by example. Possibly, any other sort of teaching is useless. At the same time, we must not drive parents to despair, and how many of us would despair if we thought that it was only by living the lives of angels that we could keep our children from being little devils ! And, in spite of all that Dr. Hadfield and Dr. Sloan Chesser may say, the ordinary parent will go on being much more afraid of his child's turning out a little devil than of its turning out a little angel. Little angels' visits to this earth, indeed, are few and far between. Little devils' visits are, perhaps, not much more numerous. But I feel sure that in the records of the lives of good men and women there may be found several little angels who were in no need of being taken to the doctor. I fancy that the child Byron was more in need of the attentions of a doctor than the child who became Sir Thomas Browne, and that Mozart was nearer being a little angel as a boy than many an infant who grew up to be a murderer. I have never known a little angel, but I see every reason why the type should not be discouraged. Besides, if we are frightened of giving little liars neurasthenia by repressing their tendency to lying, should we not be equally frightened of giving little angels neurasthenia by repressing

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their tendency to be angelic? Hence I look forward without alarm to the days when the world, having escaped from psychology, will restore the little angel to the pedestal which the little devil now occupies—when parents will band themselves together under the device “Back to the Infant Samuel,” and the busy bee will once more as of old improve each shining hour—when, though dogs may delight to bark and bite, little children will no longer be praised for tearing each other’s eyes, and the voice of the sluggard will have ceased to be music in a psychologist’s ear.

II. With an Oath ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

A SMALL girl—though, indeed, she is tall enough for her age—who was recovering from illness, looked across at me from a book she was reading—I think it was Charles Reade's "Hard Cash"—and asked me in a quiet voice: "Who was it who invented the phrase, 'With an oath'?" Having never in my life given a moment's thought to the matter, I could not tell her. "In novels," she said, "they always say 'he said with an oath.' I think it's a good phrase. Don't you?" "I always wonder," said her sister, looking up from her P. G. Wodehouse, "what those words are that are too fearful to print. Why don't they tell you what the oath was?" "Ah," said I, "that shows you how right the novelists are not to tell you. If they told you, it would probably be something quite dull like 'Drat you,' or 'Go to pot, you blear-eyed old octopus.' But, simply because they don't tell you, they leave you wondering what the man can have said, and thinking that it must have been something perfectly blood-curdling."

Few of my arguments are sound, but I think this one is. There is no doubt that, as modern authors have taken more and more to incorporating oaths as they are spoken in the text

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of their books, the oath has been losing more and more of its blasphemous grandeur. In the days when the villain used to say, "D—— you, you ——," or "This is d——d awkward," a damn was really worth a damn, and the man who uttered it seemed lit up for the moment by the ghastly limelight of Hellfire. Now that everybody in novels says "damn," a damn is no longer worth a damn. It has lost its life-blood on the painted lips of girls in their 'teens. You might almost as well say, "Oh, blow!" or "Oh, dash!" or "Oh, hang!" for all the force you can put into it. Oaths, like money, suffer from an unrestricted paper currency. The paper oath is the enemy of the true oath, just as the paper franc was the enemy of the true franc. Let oaths become words used by every novelist and schoolgirl, and there is no more vice in an oath than in a glass of warm milk. This declension in the value of oaths was admirably illustrated by my old English professor, who came into the room one day, looked at the class, leaned forward over the desk, and said, with flushed face and shining eyes, as though addressing his students, "Go to Hell!" He paused for a few seconds in order to enjoy the general look of surprise. Then he said: "Those, gentlemen, are the words I heard one workman using to another on my way here this morning. 'Go to Hell!' What a misuse of the English language! The

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man who said it sinned against every canon of good prose, because he did not even mean the other man to go to Hell. He was merely expressing surprise at some perfectly trivial thing the other man had said to him." And he went on to deliver a lecture on the corruption of language through over-statement, dwelling in particular on the French word "gêner," which he said was derived from "Gehenna." I do not know whether his philology was correct, but he declared that when a Frenchman said, "Don't bother me," he used a phrase that should have meant "Don't put me in Hell," but that through misuse had lost ninety-nine hundredths of its meaning; and he ended his lecture with a strong appeal against the vice of over-statement.

The English language, it seems to me, is in danger of falling into the same weakness as the French in this respect, now that the novelists have taken to allowing their characters to curse and swear like the troopers of our childhood. You often find a character in fiction to-day saying, "Oh, Hell!" when he means nothing stronger than a girl's "Oh, bother!" and again and again he will ejaculate "My God!" when he means something like "My hat!" So common is this sort of thing becoming that the oath is gradually losing all its sanctity, and we are rapidly approaching a time when no one but a man of genius will

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be able to invent an oath that will freeze the marrow of a Primitive Methodist child. Even "bloody" has lost much of its ancient power to thrill, since Mr. Lennox Robinson and Mr. Shaw introduced it into the dialogue of the stage. Their use of the word was, possibly, dramatically excellent at the time, but it could remain permanently excellent only on condition that other writers did not imitate them. If every writer took to saying "bloody," wherever it would or could have been said in real life, the word would come to mean as little as the adjectives of a gushing woman. Mr. Robinson and Mr. Shaw used it in order to produce a dramatic shock, but, as soon as our ears become accustomed to a word as an everyday thing, it has no longer the power to shock us. You can shock some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot shock all of the people all of the time. It is within the bounds of possibility that, if "bloody" comes into universal use in books and plays, the time will come when curates will use it in their sermons and editors in their leading articles. It will by that time have been bled of all its truculence, and will mean merely "very." At the present time, it means little more on the lips of those who use it habitually, and it is difficult to see why so unblasphemous a word should ever have been allowed to wear such an aureole of wickedness as "bloody"

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undoubtedly did wear in the reign of Queen Victoria. But, for some reason or other, everyone thought that it was wicked and unfit to print. So long as men did not print it, it was a word of power, a word suited to the lips of villains and black sheep from the Devil's own flock. To-day, alas, the baa of a sick lamb has as much demoniacal significance.

This, it seems to me, constitutes a strong argument for reticence in the arts. It is only in the last hundred years that a considerable number of writers have been smitten with the notion that a writer, instead of being an artist, should be a kind of shorthand reporter of life, and that to omit an oath or an indecency was to fail in his craft. I have the greatest respect for the work of the verbatim reporter, but he has never been ranked as an artist. None of the great reporters—G. W. Steevens, Massingham and the rest—have belonged to the shorthand school. They were artists who used their eyes and ears imaginatively, not mechanically, and selected their facts and breathed the breath of life into them as they wrote. The dramatist and the novelist have to solve much the same problem in their attempts to imitate the conversation of human beings. No man's conversation, however innocent or however foul, is fit to be reproduced in full. Even the biographer has to select and vitalize, in order to make the conversation of his hero tolerable to

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us. How tedious Dr. Johnson would have become, if Boswell had set down verbatim everything the great man said ! We hear him only in fragments, however, so that we thirst for more and wish the " Life " were ten times longer. If we had complete phonograph records of all Dr. Johnson's conversations, I am sure his reputation as a conversationalist would sink all but to the level of Goldsmith's. He is immortal as a talker, because an artist, and not a stenographer, reported him. He is remembered in great measure because most of what he said is forgotten.

Mr. Kipling observed the same law of artistic selection in putting down on paper the speech of soldiers. We may quarrel with his attempts to reproduce the Irish brogue in Mulvaney or the dialect of Yorkshire in Learoyd ; but, at least, he showed an admirable spirit of moderation in his use of the more sanguine part of the vocabulary of the barrack-room. The language of " Barrack-room Ballads " was not considered particularly chaste on its first appearance, but how chaste it was in comparison with the unprintable, if circumscribed, eloquence of the master blasphemers of the service everyone knows who has talked to soldiers of all sorts in their cups. Mr. Kipling knew the words he left out, and a large percentage of his readers knew. But he was too good an artist—apart from any question of the

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possibility of a police prosecution—to set them down in print. There are some words that are meant only for private circulation. They are, for general purposes, as foreign as the words of a foreign language, and it is the artist's business to translate them into terms of everyday speech. This is not entirely a matter of decency—though there is something to be said even for decency—but is due to the fact that some words, transplanted from life into literature, lose their native liveliness and become as dull as dying aspidistras.

In our own time, Mr. James Joyce has attempted to transplant into literature most of the foul words known to an ordinary Victorian schoolboy, and how dull "Ulysses" is to those who did not see the words for the first time in its pages! To others these words have the charm of novelty, but, if Mr. Joyce has many imitators, even his admirers will gradually find themselves flying back to Addison and Jane Austen in order to escape from boredom. Indecency and blasphemy both lose most of their vitality when they cease to be generally tabooed. If all the world were atheists, who were for ever mocking the persons of the Trinity, even the most hair-raising oaths of the most imaginative American blasphemer would come to be as anæmic as "By Jove!" or "By Jingo!" Blasphemy depends for its effect on its being a thing forbidden, a thing

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outside the code. It derives any vigour it possesses from the reverence of mankind. In a universally reverent world, "D——n you" would produce a thrilling effect. In a world that had lost its reverence, you might as well use Mr. Hutchinson's oath, "Mice and mumps!"

Hence I think it is important for the novelists to maintain as many of the customary taboos as possible. Otherwise they will find it difficult to convey the conversation of really wicked characters to the imagination. If they attempt to give a verbatim reproduction of the villain's speech, readers will grow weary of the same old string of lewd and blasphemous words, and, as they read them for the thousandth time, will say to themselves: "Oh, is that all? How dull!" On the other hand, "with an oath" might mean anything. As you read the words, you can imagine a passion-scarred face, devilish eyes, and a savage sneer. You are brought into the presence of the unspeakable. You are surrounded by a night in which constellations of oaths glitter evilly in the firmament. As regards the oath in literature, the truth is that the less you say, the more you say. For this reason, "By G——!" is greatly to be preferred to "By God!" Nearly anybody might say "By God!" but only a really wicked man could say "By G——!" Hence I would plead with contemporary novelists to give us

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back our "By G——'s" and our "d——'s" even our "——'s." Above all, let them give us back our long-lost "with an oath." Only thus can we bring back Sir Percival Glyde and his peers into literature.

III. The Empty House ♪ ♪ ♪

THERE are few things that produce an eerier sensation than to go up to a house that one knows, ring the bell, and discover that the house is no longer inhabited. One has no feeling of the kind if the occupants have merely gone out. That may cause disappointment, but it does not make one feel as if one had broken in upon the presence of the dead. I had this last sensation, when, having seen half the Spring go by in London, I took the train into the country and went for a walk in the woods near a village to which I am bound by ties of long association. The woods, as I wandered through them, were solitary. A thunderstorm in the morning and a hailstorm after lunch had made the day seem unpropitious for idle ambulation. As I sat down under a tree during the hailstorm, two of the branches, rubbing together, made a noise like the moaning of a wounded animal—so like it, indeed, that I rose and went over to a sandpit to see whether some living creature in pain were lying in it. Nature, indeed, was not cheerful, in spite of flying intervals of sunlight. No cuckoo hastened into the cold wind in this countryside of cuckoos. The willow-wren, alone among the birds from the south, defied the weather and sang according

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to the calendar. I passed through the wood and came to a copse which, for years past, had been so regular a resort of nightingales that, in that part of the country, it has been as easy to direct a man to a nightingale in the month of May as it is to direct a stranger in London to Charing Cross. Every tree and sapling in the copse had been cut down, and the whole place had been shut in with a hedge of wire. Outside, the profusion of dog's mercury gave the planet the appearance of a world of weeds. This was not the country in April, but was like the garden of a house long deserted.

All had changed. If I had been visiting the place for the first time, I might have thought it tolerable. I might even have thought it beautiful. As it was, I was as melancholy as Naboth robbed of his vineyard. That copse had for years past been partly my copse, and now I was no longer free of it. There is little so be said in favour of these modern innovations. I read a book of psychology recently in which the author declared that there is something in novelty which is in itself pleasing to the human mind. I do not agree with him. A thing that is completely new, as the gramophone and wireless were a few years ago, appeals to our curiosity and amuses us as a toy. But the things that we love most are, as a rule, the things with which we have the longest associations,

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and in them we resent the continual intrusion of novelty as almost the next worst thing to death. We deplore change, even in creatures with which we have been associated for so short a time as children and kittens. We resign ourselves to their growing up, but in our happiest moments we sometimes wish that time would stand still and that they would remain children and kittens for ever. But time—which possibly does not exist—is the master of all things. The cities we love are ruined by it, and the villages and the country places. No man can return to the scene of his childhood without feeling that it has been despoiled by the years. It has been spoiled at least for him. A street has been widened, a village shop with little old-fashioned window-frames, has been taken over and fronted with plate-glass by some universal provider, a new tenant occupies the farm and has built a new gate or roofed the outhouses with corrugated iron, or cut down the trees. Everywhere it is a good world for builders and house agents and innovators of all sorts, and we ordinary men and women suffer for it. The builder has his uses; but why does he always build in the wrong places? The new generation, everyone agrees, must be housed, but I have never heard of a case in which it ought not to have been housed somewhere else. Except, perhaps, in the fields immediately contiguous to railway stations.

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Any other field we have known for a long time is too good to be built on.

Nor is it only on the fields that the speculative builders have their greedy eyes. To-day we hear rumours that they have been attracted by the beauties of the Sussex downs, and have begun to admire them as eligible building sites. There are occasions when one feels that Barabbas must have been a builder. It is a strange thing that, with all the things that have been punishable as crimes by the laws of various nations, no one has ever thought of making building a crime. Not only is it not made a crime, but the builder is permitted to outrage the eye in a way in which no man is permitted to outrage the ear of his neighbour. So precious are our ears considered that we can prosecute a man for keeping a crowing cock or for playing the piano to excess or even for singing, if it is a nuisance to our nerves. Yet the builder has a free hand to put up houses that are an affront to the eye and that can cause misery to thousands of his fellow-creatures, without any danger of being brought to book for it. In a civilized world the eye would be put on an equality with the ear, and builders would put up new houses at their peril. When the world becomes civilized it will be more difficult to become a builder than to become a doctor, and any man who builds an offensive house will be liable to expulsion from the Builders' Council for

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infamous conduct. If builders positively must change the face of the world, let them at least be compelled to make change as nearly tolerable as possible.

That would be but to imitate the conduct of all wise statesmen. Statesmen accept change as a necessity of nature, but they know that they will be hurled from their places if they do not make it tolerable to ordinary human beings. They temper novelty with custom, and, if they are old-fashioned Conservatives, they do their best to persuade us that there is very little novelty in it. But there are no old-fashioned Conservatives left. Everywhere in politics, the passion for change is rampant. And in a sense I am glad of it. Politics are, of all things, the sphere in which change is most tolerable, even desirable. One cannot feel the same affection for an old law as for an old village. Lord Halsbury and Lord Banbury, perhaps, could in the last generation, but few of us are Conservative in that sense. You could amend almost any law on the Statute Book, and, if the change did not threaten our prosperity or comfort, it would not cost us a pang. This shows that we do not love an old law as we love an old house—with a disinterested love of antiquity and without any regard to its usefulness. Hence, while there is a good reason for being Conservative in nearly everything else, there is very little reason for being Conservative

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in politics. Here the new world will, with luck, be better than the old, and it is possible actually to believe in progress. But elsewhere change seems for the most part to be one step forward and two steps back. And, even in politics, if we are as rough and reckless as the suburban builders, it is possible for change to do more harm than good. Progress is tolerable only if the progressives have a strong leaning towards Conservatism. Mr. Webb saw this when he coined his amusing phrase, "the inevitability of gradualness."

Coming away from the wired-in copse, with a chilly wind blowing down the lane, I returned to the village in a despondent mood, and made for a little house I knew, set high above the road—a house at which I had often stayed and where a notice creaked above the road, saying "Teas provided" and "Home-made lemonade." Custom alone turned my steps to that house. There is a more attractive-looking teashop in the neighbourhood, but I was afraid to go into it lest I should be seen coming out by the landlady of the accustomed place. That landlady I had for years dreaded as a tyrant. If you were lodging at her house and were late for a meal, she would come into the room with a face like a stored-up thundercloud and, without saying a word, set you trembling. No one has ever made me eat so much blancmange as she did during my visits to her humble dwelling.

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I feared her too much even to ask her what "Sundries" meant on her weekly bill, as boots, lamp, fire, cruet and everything else imaginable had been already included. Yet, though fearing her, I loved her, partly because she was a good soul if you humoured her, and partly from the sentiment of old association. She was one of the figures in my world, and, let her horrify the senses with whatever kind of shop-cake she pleased, I wished that she might live for ever. As I climbed the steps to her cottage, I was feeling an anticipatory glow of greeting. I knocked at the door—a loud, happy knock—prepared to face shop-cake or watercress for her sake.

When no answer came, I glanced at the front of the house, and I saw that it had a deserted look. There were no blinds or curtains in the window of the sitting-room—that room in which she always tyrannically pulled down the blind, if the sun was shining, lest it should injure the carpet or the furniture or put out the fire. I looked at the kitchen garden, where her husband used to work at all hours of the day, silent and smoking, as one who believed that the two consolations of life were tobacco and cos lettuces. Weeds possessed it merely. I knocked again with a sinking heart, and there was a stillness as of death. Suddenly I felt as lonely as if I had been alone at the North Pole or in the middle of a desert. All about me the

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country was inhabited : there were children playing outside the grocer's shop and motor-cars with men and women in them were passing. But all the world had suddenly gone empty, and, had I been a ghost knocking at the dwelling of a ghost, I could hardly have felt more out of the old world that I knew. The life had departed from the body of the house, indeed, and left it an inanimate shell. I was almost as much afraid of the empty house as I used to be of the landlady.

And now I doubt if I shall ever feel quite happy in the village again. In a village, no one should ever die. No one should ever go away. Even the departure of a butcher can make the place desolate. The population is changed, and nothing will ever be the same. New faces are mere ciphers and can never mean the same to us as those vanished characters who were the symbols of permanence. . . . Luckily the railway porter at the station remains. But he, who was a young man when I first knew him, is growing white-haired. Had he not been there to clip my ticket, with his old jest, "Lighten your load, sir ?" I should have come back to London heartbroken.

IV. Sir Charles



IT is pleasant with the thermometer at nearly 90 in the shade to think about money. Money means freedom—at least, that is what it means to those of us who do not possess it. If we had money, we tell ourselves, we should be able at will to abandon work for twenty-four hours, or a week, or a month, or a year, or for ever. If we have a taste for work, as most of us have after thirty, we could at least choose our own time for working, and it would not be during a heat-wave. On the first day of a heat-wave we should set out in a large motor-car for the edge of the sea. We should take a room in a hotel with a view over the bay, and go out and lie down above the rocks and look at birds and waves and clouds—look at them passively rather than actively, as we see things in a dream. Probably we should not know how happy we were, for it is only those who are unhappy enough to be in London in summer who know how happy the people are who are at St. Ives. It is none the less pleasant on that account to think of St. Ives while we are incarcerated in London. We may live a slave's life in what is called reality, but we can live the life of a king in our imagination. An imaginary life of this kind, on the other hand, costs

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imaginary money. Money is one of the keys of liberty, and, though the excessive love of money is an ignoble passion, a modest longing for it as a means of escape is an ingredient of some of our fairest dreams.

That the longing for it is general is suggested by the fact that the money-lenders can afford to distribute their circulars in millions through the post. On me alone, who am a poor man, the money-lenders have spent scores of pounds in postage. It is difficult to believe that such a largess of stamps and stationery can give them anything like a reasonable return on their outlay. But one never hears of a money-lender's going bankrupt, and it is a legitimate inference that these circulars are not all sent out in vain. Nor is it apparently, as you might imagine, the poor and the humble alone that are enticed by the dreams conjured up by the money-lender's prose. There is a very little use, indeed, if you are a poor man, in harbouring these dreams. One money-lender, Mr. Quincetree, has sent me a circular in which he makes it reasonably clear that he will have nothing to do with you unless you are fairly well-off already. "Loans of less than £100," he declares, "are not entertained by Mr. Quincetree, but he advances up to £10,000 if your position warrants it." It is surely an odd thing that money-lenders should prefer lending their money to those who are rich already. It is as though a doctor were to

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announce that he would attend only patients who are in good health. This seems to me a little unworthy of the traditions of a great profession. Yet Mr. Quincetree positively gloats over the grandeur of his clients. His circular contains the report of a dialogue between himself and Sir Charles——("who incidentally," he observes, "is no mythical figure, but a very matter-of-fact member of Society")—which takes us straight into the glitter of Mayfair. "Good morning, Sir Charles," Mr. Quincetree begins, "I am very glad to see you again. I suppose you have come to see me about another advance." That, perhaps, was a tactless opening, since Sir Charles and Mr. Quincetree are, one gathers, on such friendly terms that Sir Charles might conceivably have dropped in to chat about the European situation, or to exchange opinions on the new edition of the Prophetic Books of Blake. Mr. Quincetree, as the event showed, however, had made an error of taste rather than of judgment. With an intuition that almost deserves to be called feminine, he knew what was on the tip of Sir Charles's tongue even before Sir Charles had spoken; and with manly frankness Sir Charles replied to him: "Yes, Quincetree, I have. I want another £200 on the same terms as before."

It seems a small sum for a man in Sir Charles's social position to ask, especially when Mr.

Sir Charles

Quincetree was confessedly willing to make the amount ten times as large. Sir Charles, however, it is evident, is a man of simple tastes, and it would not surprise me to learn that he can make £100 go as far as you or I could £1,000. What he wanted the money for we shall, unfortunately, never know. He did not tell Mr. Quincetree, and Mr. Quincetree was too courteous to ask him. No doubt all sorts of thoughts were coursing through the money-lender's brain, but, without betraying the fact that he was feeling in the slightest degree inquisitive, he met Sir Charles's demand with the unhesitating answer: "Certainly, Sir Charles, it's a pleasure to see you again, for I know that you have been entirely satisfied with the previous transactions you have had with me." Not many men who set out to borrow money are so fortunate as Sir Charles. I myself have a few friends, but I do not know a single one of them who, if I asked him for the loan of £200, would reply in the noble Quincetree fashion: "Certainly, Y. It's a pleasure to see you again." It is an ironical comment on the value of friendship that a professional money-lender—a man belonging to a class for which scarcely anybody has a good word to say—should in a matter of this kind be at once a model and a reproach to those upon whom one lavishes one's warmest affections. Sir Charles seems to have felt this, for, on hearing

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Mr. Quincetree's words, and on realizing that he was going to get the £200, he exclaimed in a burst of emotion: "I have been more than satisfied, Quincetree. In fact, I've never been treated with greater courtesy, or offered more reasonable terms—that's why I always come to you."

You may think it un-English of Sir Charles to have been so effusive as this, but £200 is £200, and the human heart beats quicker at the successful negotiation of a loan. Mr. Quincetree, somewhat taken aback by the warmth of Sir Charles's manner, began: "It's very nice of you to say that, Sir Charles. I——" But Sir Charles, with his hands almost on the money, was in an expansive, garrulous mood and with a bosom bursting with generous sentiments, refused to be interrupted. "Well," he declared warmly, "I mean it, Quincetree. You honestly deserve all the good things I can say about you. By-the-bye, that reminds me. I sent a young friend along to you about a month ago, and, when I met him last night at the club, he was even more enthusiastic than I am about the decent way you had treated him." Sir Charles, it will be seen, was one of the right (but unusual) sort. A selfish man, on discovering a saint with thousands of pounds like Mr. Quincetree, would have said nothing about it to his friends, but would have kept him as a little ray of sunshine for private basking. Sir Charles, how-

Sir Charles

ever, was like the old woman in the New Testament who, having found a piece of silver, called in the neighbours to rejoice with her. Whether Mr. Quincetree was pleased at being introduced to Sir Charles's friends in this way is not stated. He himself did not refer to the matter, but abruptly changed the subject. "Now, Sir Charles," he said, "here are the banknotes. Please count them. And remember that nobody but our two selves will hear of this transaction." Sir Charles, having no doubt counted the notes and put them safely away in his pocket, immediately became gushing and garrulous again: "Many thanks, Quincetree," he said; "that's what I like about you best of all. No fuss, no bother. Just a square deal, first, last, and all the time. Good-bye." And so the curtain falls on one of the most touching scenes that have ever taken place in the history of money-lending.

It is a scene that moves me deeply as I sit working through a heat-wave in London. It moves me all the more deeply because it is followed by the invitation; "When you require a loan, do as Sir Charles does. Come and see Mr. Quincetree." There is nothing ambiguous about that. It is as plain as an invitation to a dinner-party; and if Mr. Quincetree really means it, I shall be greatly tempted to imitate Sir Charles's young friend who came away raving about the decent way Mr. Quincetree had

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treated him. If I did, would Mr. Quincetree greet me as he greeted Sir Charles: "Good morning, Mr. Y., I am very glad to see you. I suppose you have come for some money"? And if I replied: "Yes, Quincetree, if you can spare it. I know your reputation for courtesy and how, like myself, you hate fuss and bother, or I should never have dreamt of asking you for it, but, I would rather like £1,000," would he smile kindly at my diffidence and say: "Now, Mr. Y., here are the banknotes. Please count them?" If he would, he is even a greater saint than I take him for, and Sir Charles's eulogy of him is an under-statement.

Sir Charles, however, I fancy, is one of the lucky ones—one of that enviable minority who have a gift for getting money without working for it. The rest of us are under the curse of Adam; and never does the curse work out more literally than during a July heat-wave. The world is full of pleasant harbours, and snow-topped mountains and cool woods with streams crisping through them under the wavering shadows. But these things might as well be in the "Arabian Nights" for all that we can see of them till a week-end or a holiday comes round. Money alone could release us, and therefore it is a cooling thing to think about money. Money means seagulls riding on the water of the harbour, stonechats, and butterflies among the brambles and bracken on the

Sir Charles

low cliff, a cool wind from a blue sea under a blue sky, nights of stars and harbour lights, Cornish cream at a Cornish table, beer at the "Sloop." No doubt, by this time Sir Charles is enjoying all these things. No doubt, he is to be seen every evening at the "Sloop," a loquacious figure, telling the fishermen how nice Mr. Quincetree was to him when he asked him for the £200. Some people have all the luck. Sir Charles is surely one of them. I, as surely, am not.

V. "The Mysterious Countess"



I WAS in difficulties recently over the choice of a name for a book, and I turned to the elder of my nieces for assistance. "If I were writing a book," said my niece, "I should call it something interesting, like 'The Mysterious Countess.'" "That," said I, "is a good idea. The mystery of the Countess would be, I suppose, that she didn't even appear in the book that was called after her." "I do wish," said my niece, "that you could write books like Edgar Wallace." "So do I," I assured her with considerable sincerity, "but, as I can't write the sort of book you like, the next best thing is to give a book the sort of title you like. The only thing I'm doubtful about is whether it would be fair. Suppose, for instance, you were going somewhere by train and wanted something to read. You would go to the bookstall, see a book called 'The Mysterious Countess,' hurry off to your seat, open the book just as the train was leaving the station, expecting to read about jewel thefts, spies, poisoned millionaires, and all sorts of exciting things, and find that you had bought a book without a single murder in it—a book in which there was not a single mystery except the mystery why it was called 'The Mysterious Countess.' You would have

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nothing else to read, and it would probably be a non-stop train as far as Exeter, so that you could get nothing else for several hours. What would you feel like ? ” “ That,” she declared with a shudder, “ would be ghastly.” “ And you think a lot of people would feel like that ? ” I asked her. “ Everybody would,” said my niece with conviction. “ You don’t think that some of them would be glad to find that the book they thought was only going to be a detective story was really a book like—well, the sort of book it would be ? ” “ Don’t be silly,” she laughed derisively ; “ it would be perfectly ghastly.” “ So I mustn’t call it ‘ The Mysterious Countess ’ after all ? ” “ It would be cheating,” she said firmly. “ That settles it,” said I.

And yet I have often felt that it is absurd that you cannot name a book as you name a child, without any reference to its real character. Parents name their children before they have the slightest notion what their children are going to turn out like, and the system works admirably. You call your son Hercules, not because he has shown any signs of superhuman strength in the cradle, but because you happen to like the name Hercules. I once knew a man called Hercules : he was a butcher—a “ family butcher,” as we say nowadays. But apart from being a large man and a family butcher, he had no resemblance to the hero of Greek

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mythology. But no one complained on that score that his parents had committed an act of deception in giving him his name. There are other men called Samson, and we see nothing ridiculous in this, even if they turn out to be nervous little men who are afraid of dogs. You are at liberty to give your child any name you please. You may call him after a god or a town or a battle or one of the twelve Apostles, and no clergyman will refuse to christen him on that account. During the Boer War many children were called "Ladysmith," "Kimberley," and even, I believe, "Magersfontein," and the world has been none the worse for it. You may, for that matter, call your infant "King" or "Queen" or "Prince," and no one complains. It is generally recognized that a name is not a description, but merely a means of identification. The Thomases are no greater doubters than the rest of us: the Violets are no more, and no less, modest. Even the Eustaces are seldom what you expect them to be, and who could have expected an Algernon to turn out a Swinburne? I myself am called after a professor of theology who wrote an immense book in defence of infant baptism. But I doubt if this has led to any appreciable misunderstanding. Most of the men I have known who have been named after distinguished clergymen have grown up to be extraordinarily unlike their namesakes.

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This, I know, is contrary to the view of some authorities who hold that our names have a lasting influence on our lives and that every child is doomed on the day of its christening. There are impressive arguments on both sides of the question. Against the theory, I think, is the instance of John Keats. In that name who could find the seeds of the “Ode to a Grecian Urn”? Nor does Fanny Brawne’s name seem to me to have doomed her to be fallen in love with by the author of the “Ode to a Grecian Urn.” Even with all their associations, these two names have not succeeded in becoming beautiful to us as the names of Shelley, Tennyson and Swinburne are beautiful. Most of the poets, it must be admitted, however, have been appropriately named. Milton is still a name to resound for ages, even though some kind of patent medicine of the same name is now better known to the general public. It is seldom that we find a great poet called by such a name as “Robert Browning.” Shakespeare’s name is one of the most convincing proofs that his plays were not written by Bacon. In nine cases out of ten, great men have given to them in baptism the names they deserve.

On the other hand, the practice of many writers of choosing new names for themselves and discarding the names given to them by their parents suggests a belief that there may be strange influences in names as well as in the

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stars. Could Molière and Anatole France have written as they did under their baptismal names? Did George Eliot not write novels of a kind that Mary Ann Evans could never have written? In our own time, how excellently Anthony Hope chose in abbreviating his name and so making it possible for him to become the author of "The Dolly Dialogues"!

Robert Lewis Stevenson showed as wise an instinct in altering his second name to Louis. And more recently we have seen Mr. George Bernard Shaw dropping his first name and even putting it in brackets in "Who's Who," foreseeing that George, though a good enough name for a controversialist, could never write such a play as "St. Joan"—a task better suited to the hand of Bernard. As for Rudyard Kipling—a name which many people at first took for a pseudonym—it is obvious that he would have invented this name for himself even if he had been christened John Smith. The fact that though there are more John Smiths in England than men of any other name (as I suppose there must be, though I don't think I have ever met a man called John Smith), there has never been a John Smith who was a great poet, almost persuades me that no John Smith can hope to be a great poet unless he first changes his name.

If there is this predestining quality in names, it might conceivably be dangerous to call a book without a murder or a theft in it by such a

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title as “The Mysterious Countess.” One might find ladies in black masks gradually intruding themselves into one’s work, and day by day stolen necklaces and faces at the window would fill a greater and greater space in one’s thoughts. One would feel bound to live up to one’s title, and, where one now sees just ordinary men when one goes into the country, one would begin to suspect the quiet-looking country gentleman whom one meets at the station of being a werewolf in the small hours. One could scarcely write about a cat without suspecting it of sinister influences—of being the familiar of the Countess in her heartless crimes. Not that that sounds to me a very good plot. But no doubt I should get better as I went on. In time I might be as inventive as a little boy I know who spends all his spare evenings in writing detective stories. He has, like all writers of detective stories, a great contempt for Scotland Yard, and, like most of them, he has a perfectly wonderful private detective of his own—Sleuth Hopkinson is his name—to whom Scotland Yard can always appeal when it is in difficulties. Sleuth Hopkinson’s great phrase is “Thought so.” No matter what you tell him, you cannot surprise him. Scotland Yard rings him up and says: “Is that Mr. Sleuth Hopkinson?” “Yes,” replies Sleuth Hopkinson. “Inspector Buffle of Scotland Yard speaking,” says Scotland Yard; “I want to tell you that Mr.

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Aloysius P. Jagg, the Mexican millionaire, has just been found lying in a pool of blood in Charing Cross railway station." "Thought so," says Sleuth Hopkinson. Or again: "Inspector Buffle, Scotland Yard, speaking. Betty Trippitt, the dancer, who married the Duke of Abinger Hammer, has just been found drugged and with her powder-puff stolen in the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons." "Thought so," says Sleuth Hopkinson. If you told Sleuth Hopkinson that the world had just come to an end, he would merely grunt, "Thought so." And I for one love a detective who makes it his business to know everything about everybody and whom you cannot surprise out of his imperturbability. As you might have guessed, however, the little boy is not content with giving us a mere character-study of the great detective. He also gives his readers plenty of incident. "Suddenly," he writes, "the street filled with hundreds of men wearing black masks." And that was in the centre of London, too. Some of his incidents do not seem to me to be quite true to life, as when the wicked nephew murders the rich old lady by putting an electric shock powerful enough to kill ten people in her hot-water bottle; and he is a little too fond of introducing poisonous snakes through bedroom windows. Still, it must be difficult for a writer of detective stories in these days to invent a method of murder which is at once original and

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probable. I am sure that I myself, if ever I call a book “The Mysterious Countess” and try to write up to that entrancing title, shall have to fall back on poisonous snakes, werewolves, and all the old methods that have won the approval of the English-speaking races. On the whole, however, I don’t think I shall ever write a book called “The Mysterious Countess.” But how—if only to justify my existence in the eyes of my niece—I wish I could !

VI. Strange Lives ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

ONE of the great charms of staying at an English inn is that, when one goes into the smoking-room, one finds all kinds of literature out (so to speak) of one's usual beat. Those who frequent the most luxurious hotels have no such pleasures. In the great hotels no departing guest ever leaves behind him "The Boot and Shoe Trade Gazette," "The Woolworkers' Monthly," or "The Ham-and-Beef-Shop Weekly Advertiser." In the inn, however, you may come on a belated number of almost any trade journal, from "The False Tooth Chronicle" to "The Butchers' and Fleshers' Sunday Companion." It is true that most of the people who leave their "shop" papers behind them in the cheaper hotels are motorcyclists, and frequently, if one sits in the bar till closing time, one has nothing to hold in one's hand while listening to the conversation but "The Autocyclists' World" and "Petrol Chips." Happily, during Whitsuntide, I was for a few days in an inn that had a more catholic visitors' list, and besides the usual motoring weeklies, there were all kinds of trade journals, touching on a variety of subjects from piety to farming. And, among them all, the one that attracted me most was a weekly paper a little

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above the heads of townsmen, called "Farm, Field and Fireside." The copy that I read was two months old, but to me it was as fresh as the latest novel written by the latest best-selling novelist.

Some of the farming features of the paper, I confess, were a little recondite. There was one reader's query, for instance, about a Toggenburg goat's milk yield—she was a seven-year-old Toggenburg goat, fed on oats, hay and roots, whose last kid was born in 1923, and who was still, after three years, giving one to one and a half pints of milk a day, and the querist wished to know whether this was a record. Even the Editor of "Farm, Field and Fireside" would go no farther than to say that he "imagined" this must be a case without a precedent, and to advise his correspondent to "report the full facts to the Secretary, British Goat Society, 10 Lloyd's Avenue, London, enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope." Alas, I shall never know the answer that came back in the stamped, addressed envelope; but—though I know it may seem foolish—I admit I felt, as I sat in the bar, a queer kind of longing to know whether this particular Toggenburg goat had created a record. Then there was a letter from "Constant Reader" headed "Three Angora Rabbit Questions." One of these questions was of too delicate a nature to be touched on in a page for general reading, but

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it interested me to find "Constant Reader" referred, in the course of the answer, to the Hon. Secretary of the Universal Angora Club and the Secretary of the Southern Angora Rabbit Club and told that "he could join either one or both clubs, according to preference." I do not suppose that the ordinary London clubman knows of the existence of the Universal Angora Club or of the Southern Angora Rabbit Club, and yet who can tell that there may not be as profound a pleasure in belonging to one of these as in being a member of the Bath Club or the Garrick? The members of the Universal Angora Club have at least a settled ambition in life, like a famous journalist I know who belongs to a Mousebreeders' Society and whose greatest boast it is that he once won the national bronze medal for the best silver-grey mouse. How many clubmen have done as much?

Scarcely less interesting were "Young Pigman's" contribution, entitled "Worried over Gilt," and "A Finland Reader's" letter, called "An Interesting Cow Case"; and "Mac" had a query headed "Goatling Not Doing Well." There was another man who wanted to know about the feeding, breeding and ailments of ferrets, and another called "Cush and Baz," who wished to know the cause of his mare's large knees. None of the correspondents, so far as I could discover, was in the slightest degree interested in any of the things that you

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and I discuss over the dinner-table. Nobody seemed to care whether Marcel Proust was a man of genius or a bore, or both. Nobody seemed to care about miners' wages or Mr. Baldwin or Mr. Cook. In these pages Mussolini sank into insignificance beside a prize ferret, and a sick calf or a mare with large knees surpassed in interest all the operatic stars of the hour.

Authors, I fancy, do not sufficiently recognize the fact that the interests of mankind are strangely different from the interests they impute to their characters. Reading novels, you would imagine that the most important section of the human race spent most of its time in being violently in love. But, if you read "Farm, Field and Fireside," you will discover that quite a considerable section of our race is far more interested in the diseases of potatoes. And these diseases, as you will learn, are both serious and numerous. There is "the much-dreaded wart disease"; there is mosaic disease; there is leaf roll; there is stem streak; there is crinkle or pucker; there is corky scab; and there are many other diseases, including dry rot, skin spot, and violet root rot. Is it any wonder that farmers seldom die of love? Farmers have too many troubles of their own to have time to become Romeos and Tannhäusers. I doubt if any prize-winner at an agricultural show ever broke his heart over a

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woman. I do not wish to disparage love, but there are other things in life. You will read about some of them in "Farm, Field and Fireside."

Read, for example, the article called "Fits in Pigs." The ordinary novelist probably does not even know that pigs have fits and that "usually the attack is noticed first very shortly after a pig has left its nest in which it has been lying all night snug and warm with its fellows." These things are to him mysteries, and he turns from them impatiently to the shallow unrealities of some story of a murdered millionaire. The farmer, on the other hand, keeps close to the eternal facts of life. What to him are the murders of fictitious millionaires when one of his Black Rosecomb Leghorn fowls may be suffering from a wry or squirrel tail—a gross deformity? Is there any detective in fiction who can tell him whether it is true or not that "more cattle are killed by chaff than by any other cause?"

Not that the farmer is, as the ignorant might suppose, a man of narrow interests, caring nothing except for his root-crops and his livestock, which behaves so differently from the lambs in Wordsworth and the cows in Robert Louis Stevenson. Read the general correspondence columns in "Farm, Field and Fireside" and you will see that the English farmer is a man with as wide a range of interests as

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Montaigne himself. One reader of seventy, for instance, wants to know how he can use celery seed as a cure for rheumatism. In the next paragraph "Ten Years' Reader" writes: "Please tell me of something to rid fleas from my bedrooms." A man who has not played backgammon for sixty years comes next with a request to be told "how backgammon is played with dice or draughts." Then comes "Bid," whose greatest ambition it is to become a hairdresser. "I am eighteen years of age," he writes, "and have had a good secondary school certificate, and obtained an Oxford School Senior Certificate. I should like to start a ladies' hairdressing shop, but I do not know how or where to get my training. . . . I might add that I have rather a gift for hair-cutting, so I do not think it would take me long to learn." It is a strange fact, but though there must be thousands of men who are born with "rather a gift for haircutting," and whom Providence means to be hairdressers as it means a few others to be poets, I had never yet, before reading this paragraph in a Midhurst hotel, thought of any human being as a predestined hairdresser, asking nothing better of life than to be allowed to bob and shingle the heads of ladies. Heaven knows, I am as much in debt to hairdressers as to poets, but it has always seemed to me a natural ambition to be a poet and scarcely an ambition at all to be a hair-

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dresser. I am afraid that we who write cultivate narrow views, and live in a world too remote from this young farmer who has "rather a gift for haircutting," and who has no mind to bury his talent in a napkin. Dickens, I am sure, would have understood him, but I, if I had not happened to read "Farm, Field and Fireside" in the smoking-room, should not even have guessed at his existence. May fortune attend him in his barbering! May he become the Prime Minister of his craft!

Compared to this the other subjects dealt with in the "fireside" columns of the journal are of minor interest—how to clean a brown *suède* hat, how to keep fair hair fair, whether rubber boots can be mended with motor tyre patches, how to make Turkish delight, how to make an onion omelette, whether to take cod-liver-oil for cold feet, how to cure rabbit skins, what is the minimum wage for a young baker aged twenty-one next August, whether port wine makes blood—"should think it most improbable," replies the editor—how to get rid of freckles, and whether "there is any method or tutor published for the chromatic melodeon by Mr. James Brown, Scotland's champion melodeon player." Perhaps the most exciting of these other questions is "how to remove blood-stains from a salmon-pink *crêpe de Chine* dress." It is a question, I think, to which Mr. Edgar Wallace could give the correct

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answer. And Mr. Wallace could not only tell how the blood-stains could be removed, but how they originally came on the dress.

I have not exhausted "Farm, Field and Fireside," but I hope that, at best, I have vindicated the farmer and the farmer's wife against the common charge that they are dull, bovine, materialistic and narrow-minded. What other class is so myriad-minded in its interests, and could pass so easily from the subject of corky scab in potatoes to hairdressing, and from fits in pigs to blood-stains on a *crêpe de Chine* dress ?

VII. Changes in Human Nature ◊ ◊

THERE are few remarks more often on men's lips than that "Human nature is always the same" or that "Human nature never changes." It is the commonest answer both to our hopes and to our fears for the future of the half-animal, half-angel, called man. The young Utopian, dreaming aloud of a world in which without any compulsion of law—without any hope of reward or fear of punishment—all men will live together in perfect equality and brotherhood, each giving what he can, each taking what he needs, soon discovers that his chief difficulty is not to convince his elders of the beauty of his dream but to persuade them that human nature is capable of the changes needed in order to bring Utopia into existence on earth. "You cannot," he is told, "change human nature"; and that, for the conservative, is the end of the controversy. If the unchangeableness of human nature, however, is used to silence the young optimist, it is also a popular argument against the elderly pessimist who believes that now at long last the world is going to the dogs. He, too, is told that the decay of morals, the decay of manners, the decay of religious belief, is an old story, and that human nature to-day is very much the same as it was in the days of King Minos.

Changes in Human Nature

The theory that human nature does not change—a theory that I saw advanced recently during a discussion on the future of marriage—seems to me to contain just enough truth to be dangerously deceptive. There are certain fundamental things in human nature—love, hunger, the maternal instinct, the social or gregarious instinct, fear, selfishness—that were proportionately as common in the Garden of Eden after the apple had been eaten as they are in London to-day. These are, as it were, the alphabet of human nature ; and the alphabet never changes. Plutarch made even Theseus and Romulus men with passions like our own, and the very Bushman, who seems almost as distant from us as the beasts of the jungle, is our brother in the chief of his appetites. No man, indeed, has ever understood a race of men not his own except on the assumption that the constituents of human nature are the same everywhere and in all ages. We have seen able men during our own time trying to prove that the laws of human nature did not operate in Germany or in Ireland ; and others are convinced that human nature among Jews is a fundamentally different thing from human nature among Christians. Each of these views can be supported with specious arguments. For, though human nature may in its essentials be always the same, conduct is not always the same. Each race uses the universal alphabet of human nature to spell out

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a different language. The German, the Frenchman, the Russian, the Italian, the Irishman, and the Jew are all both like and unlike the Englishman. The mistake the hostile kind of Englishman makes about them is in thinking that they are unlike him in the ingredients of human nature, whereas they are unlike him only in codes, conventions and circumstances.

This is not a distinction without a difference. If it had been remembered during the war, it would have prevented English statesmen from believing that ridiculous story about the German corpse-factory, and, by destroying the legend of the German wild beast, would have helped to bring about a saner peace in Europe. It is pardonable, and even justifiable, to regard your enemies as wicked : it is foolish to regard them as not human. The atrocities of which human beings are capable during war are themselves almost beyond belief ; invented and inhuman horrors only help to weaken the indictment of the real horrors and lead to the politics of hatred, terror and despair. Hence the knowledge of human nature—of ordinary motives, desires, hopes and fears—is of the first necessity in a statesman, and, without it, it is scarcely possible to make a good peace either in a war or in a strike. Most great statesmanship consists in knowing that your enemy is like yourself, only worse.

Changes in Human Nature

No sooner, however, do we commit ourselves to the theory that the stuff of human nature is the same in all places and in all ages than we are forced to agree that it is plastic stuff and capable of being moulded into any number of different forms, some beautiful, some hideous. In this sense, human nature does change. If it did not, religion would be meaningless and civilization impossible. All religion is founded on the belief that human nature is capable of a change for the better—that a wastrel, a drunkard, a miser, a thief, or a Pharisee can be redeemed and made a new man. And all law is founded on the belief that unruly men can be turned into good citizens. Conduct changes, and it is one of the chief objects of churches and parliaments to persuade it to change for the better and not for the worse. Even the extreme exponent of the theory that human nature never changes would probably admit that the conduct of the Pilgrim Fathers was different from what it would have been if they had held the easy-going creed, say, of the friends of Charles II. There is scarcely a sphere of conduct—the relations of the sexes, truthfulness, honesty, the treatment of fellow-citizens, the treatment of animals, the use of food and drink—in which we do not find evidence of the extraordinary plasticity of human nature. Our instincts remain the same, but we behave differently. Our creed, our circumstances, the climate in

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which we live, the current ideas of the time, all change us so that many of the habits of our ancestors seem as foreign to us as the customs of savages. We are still made of the same ingredients, but how different are the dishes we have made of them !

One of the things in regard to which the code and behaviour of Englishmen have altered greatly in the last hundred years is the treatment of animals. Only a few years ago an old rowing Blue wrote a book of reminiscences in which he told how in a great English University in his undergraduate days the crew of his boat supped together after a victory one evening and, having loosed a cat from a bag, set a terrier to chase and harry it as a noble piece of sport. You will find in the records of English social life many references to similar kinds of sport—half-drowning owls, catching sea-gulls with fish-hooks, enticing gannets to break their necks by diving against boards. Cruelty still exists to-day, but it seems to me as nearly certain as anything can be that cruelty to animals has become increasingly rare as a popular amusement. The code has changed, and the spectacle of an animal in pain or distress is not so funny as it used to be. We see a comparable change in the attitude of naturalists to living creatures. It is no longer so common as it used to be for each man to kill the thing he loves. The passion for the observation of living creatures

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has become more general, and the passion for the collection of dead creatures has dwindled. If Richard Jefferies were alive to-day, it is improbable that he would be found shooting a kingfisher. These may seem to be small changes in human conduct, but it is possible that the old proverb is true which says that a straw shows which way the wind blows. These are as much the effect of the workings of the popular conscience—of current popular ideas—as are the abolition of slavery, the attempted abolition of sweating and even of poverty, the improvement of factory conditions and schools, and every other effort to diminish suffering, servitude and ignorance.

You can see further evidence of change in the behaviour of human nature in the growth of temperance within the last half-century. Human nature may not have changed, but, somehow or other, men have become more reasonable in their cups. In all ranks of life to-day the intemperate drinker is so rare as to seem almost eccentric. If Hogarth or Dickens returned to earth in 1926, nothing would astonish them more than the sobriety of London streets towards midnight. There are still countless miseries due to drink, as well as countless pleasures ; but, in regard to the use of it, there has undoubtedly been a revolution in the general code and in the general conduct.

It is clear, then, since we have seen such

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far-reaching changes in the life of our own time, that there is plenty of room both for optimistic and for pessimistic views about the future. Our future will be the result, not only of our human nature, but of the creed that modifies and controls our human nature—of our general ideas about right and wrong, about justice and honesty and considerateness. If there were a universal revival of the Christian religion, we should have one sort of future. If there were a universal acceptance of a pagan view of life, we should have a future of another kind. There is not a single institution, from the House of Lords to marriage, that does not depend for its continuance on what view we take of right and wrong. Hence anyone who believes in the principle of authority in faith and morals is almost bound to be a pessimist about the immediate future, since the principle of authority is far less generally accepted than it used to be. Those who believe, on the other hand, in the essential goodness of human nature and that the chief thing in life is liberty of self-expression will as naturally be optimistic about the coming century. Not that authority and liberty are incompatible; modern English civilization may be said to be founded on a belief in a compromise between the two. This creed also may be said to have changed human nature. I doubt if any other creed could have enabled Englishmen to behave as the mass

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of them behaved during the General Strike of 1926.

Hence, it is only in a limited sense that it is true that "human nature is always the same." Industrialism modifies it, destroying old virtues and bringing new virtues into action. Education modifies it. New inventions modify it. Religion and quasi-religious ideas modify it. In one sense it never changes ; in another sense it changes more than anything else we know. It changes in a sense in which bird nature and beast nature do not change ; and all the gloom of the prophets, from Jeremiah to Dean Inge, has sprung from the fear that the change has been in the wrong direction. They realize, at least, that, human nature being so changeable, nothing worth having is safe without eternal vigilance. Nobody knows for certain whether the world at the present moment is going to the dogs or heading for the New Jerusalem. All we know is that we must not leave it to chance, that it is a part of human nature to direct and control human nature, that it is exceedingly unlikely we shall ever achieve Heaven on this side of the stars, but that with luck and good steering we may avoid the great maelstrom of perdition and arrive at pleasant harbour after pleasant harbour in inconstant succession between now and the last cooling of the sun.

VIII. Mud



IF you look at the map of that part of England to which I have come for a holiday, you will see a wonderful crooked inlet of blue sea with as many arms as Briareus. The inlet, you will notice, is a paradise of islands with charming names—Curlew Island, Sheep Island, Boathouse Island, and so forth. The general effect—on the map—is of something fantastic, like a dragon, and romantic like one's conception of the west coast of Scotland. Here, you would say, is a secret place of creeks and winding channels with the ocean stealing up them to lap the beach under your bedroom window in the cool air of the morning. If you come to the place, however, and arrive when the tide is out, you will discover that the map has lied or, at least, exaggerated. To the eye of the map-maker all water is blue—even the Thames at Waterloo Bridge—and the very mud that the tide deserts for all but a few hours of the day is as blue as any bay in Cornwall. This increases the attractiveness of maps, but leads to disappointment. You would be disappointed, I think, if, after having grown to love this place on the map, you caught your first glimpse of it when the tide was out. For anything less blue than these deserted shallows at such times it

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would be difficult to imagine. Here is a wide prospect of mud from three sides of the house. There is brown mud, there is green mud, there is sand-coloured mud ; there is mud that has established itself a few inches above the reach of high water and that is covered with tough grasses and withered sea-lavender. A narrow eel of water wriggles through the mud and round it listlessly, and at the wharf a boat is lying on the soft mud with a rusty tin and a brick sinking beside it in the ooze. No, this is not the beautiful dragon of the map : rather it is the primeval slime out of which the dragon emerges for a too brief period twice every twenty-four hours.

There was once a little girl of ten who met for the first time a little boy of eleven. She did not know what to talk to him about, so, for want of any better subject, she asked him, "Do you like mud ?" The boy said "No," and that was the end of conversation between them for the day. That boy would scarcely have enjoyed himself here. Yet I am sure that there are more happily-constituted boys who do like mud and who would have given a different answer such as would have enabled the conversation to continue. The dislike of mud is not innate in us. We do not as children shrink instinctively from touching it with our hands and feet. When we are children we are less afraid of muddy passages into fields, trodden

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into a squelch by the feet of cattle, than our elders. We had as soon walk through a puddle as round one. We can spend a happy day damming a rivulet in the ditch with mud and clods of earth, and tracing a channel through the bank of mud so that sticks and grasses may float swiftly along it. If at a later stage we play Rugby football, the muddier the field is the happier we—some of us, at least—are. Or it might be nearer the truth to say that, if the field is muddy, we can revel and roll in the mud as cheerfully as on the greenest sward. I have never made a mud-pie, but that, too, is said to be one of the amusements of childhood. So general is this love of mud among the young, indeed, that Mr. Belloc thought it worth devoting one of his "Cautionary Tales" to a warning against it. There was nothing abnormal about little Franklyn Hyde in Mr. Belloc's poem :

His uncle came on Franklyn Hyde,
Carousing in the dirt ;
He shook him well from side to side,
And hit him till it hurt,
Remarking with a final thud,
"Take that, abandoned boy !
For playing with disgusting mud
As though it were a toy."

There you have the eternal opposition between the points-of-view of childhood and crabbed age. Both are possibly right. We who have grown up should never allow ourselves to forget that we, too, have lived in muddy Arcadia.

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And, upon my word, you could not live here for long without recovering some of that early love of mud. You may not, when you are bathing, like to feel your foot squeezing into soft mud above the ankle or the thick discoloration of the water all about you that results from it. But mud as a spectacle becomes daily more charming. It is at once so varied, so level, and so desolate. The fields lie beyond it so peacefully in the sun with their sparse hedges and the dark shapes of elms and oaks motionless as in a picture. There is no such peace to be got from hills as from these flat stretches of mud and grass and corn with here and there a haystack or the tiled roof of an old farmhouse. And the mud itself is not entirely a desert. A great black-backed gull stands on a bank of it, plunges his beak into it, and begins tugging at something still buried. He presses his feet alternately against the mud and waves his wings vigorously in order to give more force to his pull. With a wrench, he has got what he wants—whether weed or worm—clear of the mud, and a frightened crab that he has disturbed scuttles away from him, only to catch the eye of a herring-gull that sails down and alights at a safe distance from the larger bird.

Or a heron, with clouds for wings and with its long legs stretching behind it, moves slowly from the east and lands gently on the edge of the shallow stream that flows among the mud

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even at low tide. How admirably staid he is as he puts his foot into the water! How patient he seems as he wades up and down, like a melancholy old gentleman with his hands behind his back! Even so will you see an elderly man at Clacton, his trousers tucked up to his knees, an old-fashioned gold watch-chain across his swollen stomach, a hooked pipe under his grey moustache, slowly parading the edges of the sea, ankle-deep in the water, a hairy-legged solitary. Children do not take their bliss in this fashion. They paddle excitedly, playfully, lively. Only an old man, free from self-consciousness, can paddle with the lazy, melancholy air of a heron. Yet, though the wading heron is a part of our holiday, wading I fancy, is no holiday to the heron. Placid though he seems, he is driven by hunger. Stalking into the deeper water, and, with his bill in the air, he looks out of the black patch of each eye in turn in search of enemies on the shore. When he is satisfied that he has the world to himself, he lowers his bill and leans forward to study the stream. He remains for a time as still as a post till, spying a crab in the mud, he darts at it with his long beak, throws back his head, and tries to swallow the creature at a gulp. He wades out of the water on to the more or less dry land in order to struggle the better with his catch. He tries to shake it down his throat with a vigorous

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motion of his head. He drops it in the mud in order to take it up again with refreshed energy. You would swear that the crab, which projects at both sides of his bill, was a greater mouthful than he could ever manage, but suddenly, whether he has swallowed it whole or not, it has disappeared, and the heron is striding into the water again, the noblest creature alive in the all but lifeless waste.

Nor can you walk far among the salt marshes without alarming a family of redshanks into flight, or without a curlew hurrying round you in a wide semicircle, uttering lamentations out of his long, curved bill. Is there any sea-bird or water-bird, I wonder, whose cry or whistle is not melancholy? Is there any that sings in praise of life like the wren and the skylark and so many birds of the land? The black-headed gull has been called the laughing gull, but was there ever cachinnation less hilarious? So far as I can judge, the duck is the only water-bird that makes sounds of rejoicing. Every other bird moves like a melancholy voice over the wilderness of waters.

Yet this is no melancholy scene even at its muddiest. And, when the tide fills and makes blue lakes and rivers among the marshy islands, it is as if the legend of the map were verified. It is an expanse as lovely as flooded fields, and, when the wind falls, the cloud in the sky hangs deep in the mirror of the water, and the swallows

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that skim the glassy surface round your boat all but touch the pale breasts of their images as they fly. Beyond the green of the marshes and the intervenient waters a white sail out at sea is visible, and the funnel of a passing steamer. Cattle come down to the edge of the lake—for it looks like a lake—and stand with scarcely a motion by the filling tide. A group of horses stands near them, almost as still in the sun. There is a hum of machinery in the air, where crops of beans and of wheat are falling as they never fell to the scythes of more laborious days. On the brambles round the yellow cornfields yellow-hammers are singing. All the monotony of summer warmth, of summer sunshine, is in their song. If the popular translation of the song is true, it is a song of discontent; but, if it is, it can only be discontent that the content of summer cannot last for ever—a reasonable protestation.

But, brief as are full tides and summers, most of us can mingle contentment with our regret for this. We can be content even on the shores of a wide sea of mud, and, indeed, if we cannot be content on the edge of the mud, we can be content nowhere. You should see our mud by moonlight, with a star reflected in the last streamlet of the fugitive waters. Those who live by the mud say that you have only to get used to it in order to love it. I am getting used to it.

IX. Quiet



"WELL," said the extraordinarily good-natured woman who looked after us, as I shook hands with her before leaving Mead-super-Mud, "you can't say but what you've had a quiet holiday. To anybody coming from London it's more of a change, I dare say; it's more restful." "A quiet holiday," I thought on my way to the station; "yes, it was quiet, quite different from life in London with its constant succession of excitements," and I began to recall one by one those long days of peaceful sunshine. There was, for instance, that day of blue and gold on which the elder of my nieces was bitten by the dog that was left in our care. That was a change from London. It was not a serious bite, and the dog looked very apologetic as he slunk off afterwards, with his tail lowered, across the lawn, but at least it was a change. We all made little of it and agreed that it was not the dog's fault, and gave him everything he asked for, from roast beef to lumps of sugar.

Then a guest arrived who is a great lover of animals, and the dog bit her, too. He bit her in the face as she sat caressing him on the lawn, so that her left cheek ran with blood, and for several days had to be treated with

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iodine and peroxide of hydrogen. We all agreed again that it wasn't the dog's fault, but the mother of my nieces began to keep a watch on his habits and to tempt him with saucers of water in order to make sure that he had not developed an unnatural hatred of that pleasant liquor. I take credit to myself that I scouted the notion. "The dog's all right," I said; "he's as sane as you or I. It was her fault." If I myself had been bitten, I should perhaps not have been quite so certain; I might at least have taken the dog down to the edge of the water and observed his behaviour on being tempted with a stick or a stone to go for a swim. I should have made experiments of the same kind if any member of my family had been seriously bitten. But, when a guest is bitten, I feel none of these alarms. I am then the coolest man in Christendom, and can tell a sane dog from a mad one at a glance of the eye. No one who had not been bitten himself, or had not had a niece bitten—bitten till the blood comes, I mean—could have doubted the sanity of Jack. It was clear to the naked eye that he loved water like a teetotaller, and I patted him warmly, said "Good dog!" and gave him a lump of sugar.

Our guest left us, and Sunday came. Sunday was the day on which the great black retriever in the yard was loosed from his chain and given his weekly holiday from the kennel. I am all

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against dogs being chained up, but, if they are accustomed to being chained, I cannot feel as much at my ease with them as I should like when I meet them wandering about with a loose chain dangling from the collar. In such circumstances, I am never the first to pet the dog. If I say "Good dog!" it is with a different intonation from my usual greeting. This dog had a queer way of baring his teeth when he was pleased that did not please me. You could not run after a ball comfortably while he was anywhere about. Nothing happened, however, till we were sitting at tea, when the howls of a small boy came through the window. We looked out and saw the small boy rubbing the calf of his leg and the black dog crawling about among the boats on the foreshore in a voluptuous serpentine way. "Do all the dogs in this place bite?" cried the mother of my nieces, hurrying out to examine the child's wound. The master of the dog, a good-natured man with an ear-ring in his right ear, gaped from the dog to the child with astonishment. "Never knew him to do such a thing before," he said. He did not reproach the dog; he did not pet it; he did not attempt to attend to the injured child or to blame him. "Plays with the children," he kept saying to himself; "as quiet a dog as you could meet." The whole thing was simply a puzzle to him, and he stood there by the mud trying to make

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it out. The boy was then brought into the house and was found to be bitten on the calf of one leg and behind the knee of the other. With a large chocolate with a hard centre in his mouth, his outcries soon dwindled into spasmodic gulps ; his tears ceased to flow and left merely tracks under his eyes that he had rubbed with his dirty fists. With a caramel in his mouth, he even became talkative. As the iodine was painted over the tooth-marks by angelic hands, he began to recall how he had once had the top of his finger caught in a deck chair and had had to keep it tied up for a month. He held up the finger and showed it to us boastfully. He was very proud of it—as proud as he will be a little later of the dog-bite. O blessed accidents, that make our past lives interesting to us ! You who have been run over by a bicycle in your childhood, you who have been nearly drowned, you who have been in a not too serious motoring accident, are brothers and sisters of this small boy in his orgilosity. How he admired the romance of his destiny as he remembered the day on which his finger was caught in the chair ! Still, as the iodine painted his little calf a deeper and deeper brown, I could not help reflecting that a record of three bites for one house in so short a holiday was excessive.

I had noticed a few days before a cottage in the neighbourhood called “Iodine,” and had

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been puzzled to find a house called by so strange a name—the strangest name, perhaps, except “Calomel,” to be seen on any modern English gate. I now realized, however, that in a country of biting dogs iodine must seem one of the most precious and beautiful things on earth. One can imagine poets who live at Mead-super-Mud addressing odes to Iodine. Is it not, after all, rather like the name of a goddess?

Then Beryl arrived, and one morning, with my two nieces, ran off along the road to meet another friend of theirs who was coming from the station by car. As they ran, Beryl tripped over a stone and arrived back in the car a casualty. She was seriously enough hurt, it was clear, to need a doctor's attentions, and there was no doctor nearer than two miles, and no telephone. How glorious an invention the telephone seems when there isn't one! How much more glorious it would be if its use were forbidden on trivial occasions and were permitted only in emergencies! In the absence of a telephone, a little girl of the house who was about as high as your knee hurried off to the village on a bicycle for help. Half-hour followed half-hour and no doctor came. In the end I was sent off along the road to look for a house with a telephone and to get into touch with him. After a mile or so, I saw a house with a wire running across the road to

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it, and walked through the gate. There was a brown and white dog on the step, but even so I advanced and rang the bell. The maid was sympathetic when she heard there had been an accident. I am afraid that from my woebegone expression she had a vision of mangled corpses lying along the road among the ruins of motor-cars. When I was going away after sending the message to the doctor, she refused any reward for her kindness. "Wouldn't dream of it," she said, shaking her head. The dog followed me with a greedy expression on my way to the gate.

When the doctor arrived, he found a dislocated arm, a knee cut and full of gravel, with various other injuries. Dressings and other things would be needed in the morning to supplement the few medical odds-and-ends that were at hand, and as there was no soda-water in the house I decided to order some when I was in the village for the dressing. The woman of the house had a small donkey and a high gig-like donkey-cart, and I asked her whether it would be possible for me to drive it in and bring back the soda-water myself. "He's a perfectly quiet animal?" I suggested in a careless offhand tone, for I have never driven a donkey. "He's all right," she replied, looking at me earnestly through her glasses, "except just at the start, when he has a way of rearing up on his hind legs." She threw up her arms

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into the air in imitation of a donkey on its hind legs. "At the start he always gives three great jumps, and then gallops like mad till he's got past the cottages. But that's only friskiness after being let out of the stable, and when he settles down he's as quiet as a child." "He's—he's not afraid of motors?" I said, beginning to feel a little apprehensive, or, rather, a little hopeful of a good excuse for not being committed to the journey. "He doesn't mind motors at all," she declared with an emphatic gesture. "The only thing is that if a cart with milk-churns passes him, the jingle of the churns seems to excite him, and he wants to race it, like. But there's nothing the matter with him, except that he's a young donkey, and has never been broke."

I passed a restless night, wondering whether I had the nerve to take part in a race between a half-broken-in donkey and a milk-cart along a country road—perhaps through the main street of the village itself. When I had finished breakfast the next morning, either my desire for soda-water had weakened, or my dread of the mockery of my fellow-creatures had increased, and I asked the woman of the house if she could get me a few bottles of soda-water by some slower, surer way.

I set out to buy the dressings on foot, my conscience pricking me for my cowardice, and, as I found there was no chemist's shop in the

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village, I went into a small shop, in the window of which I saw cricket balls, picture postcards, soap, millinery, a bottle of gripe water and some lead pencils. A charming old lady in spectacles told me that she had no boric lint, or whatever it was I had been sent for, and began to look short-sightedly through the shop for something that would do instead. At length, she went to the back of the shop, and produced an old cast-off muslin—is muslin the right word?—blouse. “I wonder if this would do,” she said. “When I was young we were taught never to give in because we couldn’t get what we wanted, but to look and see if we couldn’t find something else that would do instead. I was going to throw this away the other day, when it struck me that it might come in useful for something or other. It’s quite clean, and would do, don’t you think, for dressings or poultices. You wouldn’t be insulted if I offered it to you?” she asked. “It’s charming of you,” I told her, and she cut away the button-holes, cut the rest of the garment into strips, and folded it into a parcel.

On my way home with the blouse I overtook the little girl no higher than your knee, from the house. She had been shopping in the village and was wheeling a perambulator, with one of the tyres off, which was full of my bottles of soda-water, groceries and weekly papers. Her infant brother was crying in her wake

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because there was no room for him among the soda-water bottles in the perambulator. "You'd better take him by the hand," I said to her, "and give me the perambulator." How that antiquated vehicle creaked and staggered over the stones under the blazing sun between the banks of knapweed on the roadsides! When I looked round a few moments later she had her brother in her arms, though he was almost as tall as she was, his feet level with her ankles, as she carried him, a girlish St. Christopher; and, when I offered to exchange him for the perambulator, she would not part with her burden. As I propelled the squeaking perambulator home, I knew that I was walking beside an angel. If you had seen her carrying the tired child you couldn't have doubted it.

It was certainly a change from London, and when another of the angel's brothers nearly got drowned on the last day of the holidays, and had to be pulled out after sinking for the second time, it was but another incident in the equality of country life, so restful after the abnormality and excitements of London. The curious thing is that the country people themselves believe that the country is a quiet, uneventful place, and the behaviour neither of dogs nor of donkeys will ever convince them of the opposite.

X. The Wryneck ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

MY favourite bird is the wryneck. It is true that I have never seen a wryneck. It is true that, in the pictures of it that I have seen, it looks strangely like a bird afflicted with mumps. It has an ugly name—the sort of name Thersites would have given to a bird—the sort of name that small boys use in insult, such as Hen Toes, Bun Face, Pear Nose. Nor do its habits seem particularly agreeable. The family, according to Sir Thomas Browne, who knew them as “hobby birds,” are “marvellously subject to the vertigo and are sometimes taken in these fits.” It writhes, like Uriah Heep, and, if disturbed in its nesting-hole, hisses like the vilest of the reptiles, on which account it is known in some places as the snake-bird. Naturalists speak of its skulking and creeping habits, and its dread of coming into the open and of looking a human being in the face has led Sir William Beach Thomas to affirm that in the loveliest time of the year “a wryneck is virtually invisible.” Its music has been praised by some writers, but its scientific name, *Lynx torquilla*, which is said to mean “twisting shrieker,” does not suggest that it is a rival of the nightingale. A recent writer, Mr. Stanley Morris, says of it: “The syllables, ‘que,’

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' que,' ' que ' repeated from seven to eight times in succession, in a twangy nasal manner, will give a fair representation of the call." Mr. G. G. Desmond and others, however, verbalize the call as "Pay—pay—pay," Mr. Desmond adding that "there is not a gentler, mellower, happier cry in the whole gamut of an April day," and that "in tone and pitch it is rather near the 'jug-jug-jug' of the nightingale." Till I am sure that I have heard it—and I find it difficult to be sure that I have heard a bird until I have also seen it—I will suspend judgment on the music of the wryneck, with a slight bias in favour of the theory that its beauty lies in the ear of the hearer rather than in the twisted throat of the bird.

None the less, I am quite honest in affirming that—temporarily, at least—my favourite bird is the wryneck. If I go into a wood and do not find a wryneck, the wood is to me to this extent a desert. I miss no other bird with the same sense of loss. If I do not see the nuthatch in the neighbourhood of his ancient hole in the oak, I am disappointed, but only mildly, for I know that if I do not see a nuthatch to-day, I shall see one to-morrow running hither and thither down the branch of a tree like a dog following a scent. I can spend a cheerful enough day without seeing a tree-creeper, for the world is full of tree-creepers. I should be sorry not to find the nightingale in his accus-

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tomed copse near the railway bridge, but I should have no doubt that I should find him there next year. The absent wryneck, however, teases me with the sense of a defeated purpose. I feel like a child ignorant of an important letter of the alphabet—eager to learn it, but incapable of doing so. There are, I confess, other letters in the alphabet of the birds of which I am equally ignorant. I have never seen even a crossbill. The hoopoe, the bittern and the golden oriole are strangers to me. The Dartford warbler is said to be growing commoner, but it might as well be an extinct species for me. As for those rare birds with pictures of which the writers on British birds deceive us into so many false hopes—birds worthy of being embroidered on a Chinese cloak—the roller, the bee-eater and the wall-creeper—though I should like to see them, I have as little expectation of seeing them on this side of the grave as of seeing an elephant in the wild state. My ignorance of them, I feel, is neither culpable nor humiliating. My ignorance of the wryneck, on the other hand, is—at least, so it seems to me—both.

Hence, my quest of the wryneck is not the quest of something rare and precious. There is in it no passion as it were for the North Pole or for the lost cities of the desert. Rather, I am like a Londoner who has never seen Westminster Abbey or the pleached alley in the Dutch garden

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at Kensington. The very commonness of the bird is for me its greatest attraction. Not to have seen it is to have missed an everyday experience—to have been eluded by one of the familiar things. Does not Hudson assure us that wrynecks are to be found at Kew ?

When I entered the gate of a Surrey wood on Saturday, I was full of the old unconquerable hope of discovering the obvious. The sunlight was scattered and broken among the June leaves, and beyond the shade of the trees the new bracken was untwisting its last curls in the warmth. Foxgloves with their spotted thimbles were growing tall, and the climbing corydalis was holding on to everything that would give support to its helpless stem. Behind them was a grove of pines : a little to one side was a plantation of saplings of oak, ash, and silver birch. The voice of a young bird came from some hidden place, scolding a parent that was too slow in supplying the needs of its appetite. A lark so high that its song was little more than a scratch of music sang above a neighbouring meadow, and, indeed, had it not been for the voices of the birds, the world would have been so silent as to have seemed to be asleep in the blaze of the sun. Suddenly, a few feet away from where I was sitting, the most graceful of all the birds, a willow-wren, darted out of nowhere as if between the shutting and the opening of an eyelid and settled on a

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swaying fern, watching me with a startled eye as it swung up and down. In no other bird surely is there such a combination of gentleness and grace as in this little creature with wings of the most delicate shade of brown and breast of the most delicate white. I doubt if there is anything else in nature that so nearly approaches perfection as the willow-wren. If it has never appeared in legend, it is because it is too exquisitely small for those ordinary metamorphoses of large princesses and lumbering goddesses. It is the metamorphosis of a spirit—song made visible. And, as I watched it hanging so timidly to the stem of the fern, I almost forgot that this was a world in which I had never seen a wryneck. It disappeared as suddenly as it had come, and, a minute later, the young bird that had been grumbling about its food appeared as suddenly among the leaves of a birch-sapling and continued its complaint. It, too, was a willow-wren, with the down on its infant head still rumped and untidy. The parent bird flew back to it and, from a spray beside, thrust a newly murdered insect into its throat, and then flew away again. The young bird grumbled that it was not enough. The parent came back with another dead insect in its beak, and, no sooner was it gone than the little glutton was finding fault again. Strange to think that so insatiable and grotesque an appetite will one day grow into the

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sweetest singer of the gardens and the woodlands !

All through the wood, indeed, the leaves were as noticeably clamorous with the greed of the new generation as with the songs of the older birds. A family of long-tailed tits, with their chocolate wings and white faces, filled the heart of a thornbush with their restless presences, cheeping for food. Young jays, children more raucous than their raucous parents, were, further on, shrieking with hunger as they practised holding on to branches. The charm of the young jay is that he has not yet learned to be terrified—at least, not to be quite so terrified as his father and mother. The grown-up jay is as nervous as the wicked who fleeth when no man pursueth. It may be that there is some racial tradition among these birds in which man figures as an ogre, and, indeed, from the point of view of a bird, a man returning from a day's shooting must seem extraordinarily like an ogre dragging princesses by the hair of the head to his infamous castle. The worst of this is that the jay—which is a pretty bird to look at but not at all a pretty bird to listen to—is, save for the fugitive white near its tail, less familiar to our eyes than to our ears. Hence, I was charmed when a young jay, shouting harshly, perched, not without stumbles, on a branch a yard or two away from me, with its medley of colours and its jewel-blue wing-

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feathers as visible as in a picture. It is odd that, in this country, at least, Nature seldom or never seems to give a bird a pure blue feather and a beautiful voice at the same time. We do not go to the jay, the duck, the peacock, or the kingfisher for song. Or even to the swallow, though we could praise the song of the swallow without lying, or to the blue-tit for all the prettiness of its bell. I suspect the wryneck of having a blue feather hidden somewhere under its wings.

As I crossed a field leading from one part of the wood to another, a peacock butterfly was hurrying backwards and forwards, as iterative as a bat above a village street. In the wood beyond, rabbits ran into the undergrowth, showing the same fugitive white as the jays. It was cruel of Nature to mark her runaways so conspicuously. Where the wood is divided by a road, a nightingale was singing his last notes before the summer silence—the very heeltaps of song. Who would not sit down, however, to listen to a nightingale, even when his voice is that of a two months' veteran? He has not the ecstasy of the tree-pipit, that descends from his flight like a parachute to a tree-top, singing as he falls; but still he is the nightingale, and my favourite among the birds next to the willow-wren and the wryneck. Garden-warbler, wood-wren, wren, blackbird, thrush, robin, yellow-hammer, nuthatch, tree-creeper, tit, rook,

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hedge-sparrow all mingle their voices without dissonance, and, if only a wryneck were present, what more could a man want, lying on the grass amid the gold of tormentil and the paler yellow of rockrose ?

The worst of it is, I do not know whether it was a wryneck that I saw on my way back through the wood or not. A strange grey bird, barred (I thought) and of a clumsy shape, stood on a bench under an old oak, but, as I drew near to see what it was, it flew off into a sapling, and, when it moved, moved with the uneasy flight of a young bird. The friend who was with me cried, " A wryneck ! " but that, I think, was to comfort me. Had it but remained in the sapling till I came near it, I should be able to tell. As it is, I am uncertain of everything but this. If that bird with the incompetent wings was a wryneck, then the wryneck is no longer my favourite bird, for I have seen it. If, on the other hand, it was not a wryneck, then the wryneck is still my favourite bird, making every wood wonderful with the prospect of its ultimate discovery.

XI. On Lent ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

LENT is a season of abstinences, in the principle of which I believe, but which I do not observe in practice. Principle and practice pull me in different directions between Ash Wednesday and Easter as at all other seasons of the year. Yet the principle of giving up a few things for a few weeks has something very attractive about it. There is here nothing of the harshness of perpetual self-denial. Fasting is succeeded by feasting, and it is recognized that, while there is a time for abstaining, there is also a time for enjoying what most people call the good things of life. Human beings in the mass are clearly not framed for never-ending austerities. We get to know each other better through our common indulgences, and most of these have in themselves no taint of wickedness that we should avoid them too severely. Under their genial influence we again and again enjoy liberty, equality and fraternity with our fellows. They are part of our relaxations, and without some relaxation the ordinary man would sink exhausted into an early grave. The secret of happiness for most men is to work like ants during their working hours and, as soon as work is over, to be able to relax their minds and their muscles as though there were no pleasures in life but those of idleness.

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For the ordinary man, to relax means to turn to some pet indulgence which has probably been condemned by the austere of a bygone age. There have been austere men who thought it a sin to read novels, to dance, to play cards, to drink wine, to go to theatres, to smoke, or even to play football. Yet, in the modern world, all these things are generally regarded as innocent pleasures. The fact that they have become an accepted part of ordinary life makes it all the more advisable, however, to try to discover now and then whether they have become so necessary to us that we can no longer do without them. There are many who declare for instance, that life would not be worth living to them without tobacco. "If you go on smoking," a man was told by his doctor, "you will kill yourself." "Then," replied the man, "I will kill myself." And, some time afterwards, he dropped dead on the golf links. How many men are there who would be so heroic in their stand against abstinence? The ordinary man, I am sure, if he were told by his doctor that he must either give up tobacco or be prepared to die suddenly, would give up tobacco for at least a day or two. "For thy sake, Tobacco, I would do anything but die," said Charles Lamb in his farewell to it. And common sense applauds him. To say that life would not be worth living without tobacco would be to take too pessimistic a view of existence. I

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confess that, though I smoke with few pauses from breakfast till bed-time, I no longer regard smoking as one of the positive pleasures of life. If I do not deceive myself, I now smoke in order to be able to work without being constantly interrupted by the irritating consciousness that I am not smoking. If I were offered as a gift from the gods the cessation of the desire to smoke, I should accept it with gratitude. I do not wish to speak ill of a popular habit, but the chief pleasure smoking now affords me is the pleasure of not being without a cigarette.

I should like a Lent, therefore, in which men would have a sufficient motive for giving up tobacco, and not only a sufficient motive but a compulsory and unpostponable date. Few men can abstain when the date of the beginning of their abstinence is left to themselves. Tomorrow is always a better day for abstinence, if we are left to regulate our own calendar. If the observance of Lent became general, and there were either a law or a custom with the force of a law that every man must give up for the season something that he would really miss, with what a pleasant sense of heroism you and I would rise on Ash Wednesday morning and prepare to resist temptation! If there were a church that made it a rule to abstain from tobacco during Lent, I should be strongly inclined to join it. But the abstinences enjoined by the churches are abstinences that

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would cost me no sacrifice. I should not mind eating fish instead of meat for a day or a month or a year. Life on a fish diet would seem to me to be still well worth living. Nor should I object to even a more rigid fast than that. I have never shared a Lenten meal with the pious that was too small for me. There are some, I believe, who go on occasion without milk in their tea, but in China tea may this not be even an improvement ?

As for tea, would life be worth living without it ? The pleasure of drinking tea is, to my mind, more positive than the pleasure of smoking tobacco. We do not drink tea merely because we should miss it if we didn't. There are a few people who are addicted to tea-drinking almost as slavishly as others are addicted to smoking, and probably with them tea-drinking serves little purpose but to still a craving. But for most of us every good cup of tea is as good as the first cup we ever tasted. There is fragrance and flavour in these leaves such as never arose from the leaves of the tobacco plant. This being so, you might imagine that men would become greater slaves to tea than to tobacco. But our physical constitution prevents this. It would be even more difficult for the ordinary man to go on drinking tea all day than to go on drinking beer all day—a feat of which few men leading sedentary lives are capable. Nowhere is the law of the diminishing

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return of pleasure more remorseless in its working than in tea-drinking. It is a law, no doubt, that applies to every form of pleasure, but it applies most fatally of all to the pleasures of the physical appetites. Hence, we easily resign ourselves to moderation in tea-drinking, and many people who would miss it most are people who do not drink it oftener than once or twice a day. I myself am sufficiently a slave to it to prefer a cup of bad tea in the afternoon to no tea at all. But, much as I depend on it, I should not like to commit myself to the view that life without tea would not be worth living. Great and good men lived without tea in the past, and looked at life through eyes at least as cheerful as their successors do to-day. If there were a church that made it a rule to abstain from tea during Lent I should not join it, but I should not regard as crazy those who did.

The great advantage of giving up either tea or tobacco is that it is a step on the way to knowing what it is that makes life worth living. Men who have deliberately lost themselves in the wilds—in the waste spaces of the Arctic and the Sahara—have had to do without many things that make life worth living to the rest of us, and nine out of ten of them have come back to report that they found it much easier to do without the everyday necessities of civilization than they could have imagined. Confirmed townsmen often talk as though life

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would scarcely be worth living outside London or one of the great cities. They regard the country as a wilderness, and would rather walk down Piccadilly than in the loveliest garden on earth. Every prospect of green fields is to them vile, and the noise of birds is discord compared to the music of a dance band. This, I think, is a state of soul that could be cured by a Lenten abstinence from urban pleasures and by a compulsory six weeks' visit to the detested countryside. The townsman would then learn that life can be not only tolerable but even enjoyable without clubs or theatres or cinemas or dance-bands or crowds. The truth is, in whatever environment we find ourselves, we soon begin to create our own pleasures, and the man who is unhappy in the country is probably a man who was unhappy in town without knowing it. His apparent happiness in town was a desperate daily flight from unhappiness rather than an escape into real happiness.

The happiest man is he who can do without things most easily, for he is a man who does not depend on external things for his happiness. He carries his happiness about with him, and it is as inseparable from him as his skin. And this inseparable happiness seems to have been discovered as often by people who have been deprived of many of the things that you and I would say make life worth living as by those who have "everything," and who have never had

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to go without anything, in the ordinary sense of the words, in their lives. You are just as likely to get a cheerful account of life from the blind, the crippled, and the sufferers from mortal illnesses as from men and women who are healthy and wealthy without being wise. There is no rule for the distribution of happiness. Most of us would say that we would rather be dead than live such a life as the blind, deaf and dumb Helen Keller and the armless and legless Froidevaux. Yet these amazing characters assure us that life is good even without sight, without speech, and without legs and arms. Pessimism is just as likely to arise from having too much as from having too little. You will find as high a proportion of pessimists in the West End as in the East End of London. Happiness, indeed, consists not in being able to satisfy all our wants, but in not caring very much whether we satisfy most of them or not. It is more independent of circumstances than most of us imagine, though you and I will probably continue to try to attain it with the aid of circumstances. Philosophers from the beginning of thought have assured us that it is in vain for us to look for it outside ourselves, but we still follow mirages that any philosopher could have told us would lead us only to a desert of sand.

Hence, it would be an excellent training for most of us during Lent to see how many things

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we could do without—whether tobacco or meat or wine or wireless or books or newspapers or taxis or buses or cinemas or sugar or cakes or cards or billiards or dancing or, indeed, anything that an ordinary man or woman or child would miss, without actually offending against the laws of health or decency. You could not ask a man to do without his daily shave, for—though life is apparently worth living without shaving—that would be indecent, and you could not incite people to abstain from soap, for that would be unhealthy. But we could undoubtedly get on very well for a few weeks without nine out of ten of the things that seem an essential part of our daily lives. We should find, I imagine, that we could be reasonably happy without entering a bus or a taxi or a train during the season, and we should probably be all the better for a little walking. As for tobacco and wine and meat, we should discover new sources of cheerfulness, and could even enjoy the pleasures of company—for a time at least—at a table containing nothing but brown bread and water. The chief danger would be that we should become puffed up with conceit, for that would ruin all. For the sake of our characters, it is important that the period of abstinence should not last beyond a few weeks, and that we should then return to our accustomed indulgences and learn in their company to live humbly, eating and drinking like Christian men.

XII. More About Hats ~ ~ ~

IT is difficult to say whether, as the world grows older, life becomes more or less like a comic opera. It is easy to read the history of remote ages as comic opera, for in remote ages people at least dressed like the characters in comic opera. Nero and his times might easily (if we subdue our sense of horror as we read about them) have been invented by W. S. Gilbert; and Henry VIII and his procession of wives only need a lively musical accompaniment in order to endear them to playgoers all the world over. Even as it is, Nero and Henry VIII are, nine times out of ten, mentioned as figures in a joke. Few but historians and people with sectarian prejudices ever refer to them seriously. They were too bad to be true. Our incredulity, as we read about them, is greater than our horror: it actually defeats our horror. Had we been contemporaries of Nero—at least, if we had been living in Rome at the time—we should probably have found it rather difficult to see the comic side of his behaviour, but, removed from him by a distance both of time and of place, we see him as a monster in a legend, and are no more disturbed by his antics than by those of a centaur or a mermaid. If his wickedness had been of a more normal kind,

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we should, it is almost certain, detest him without any relief of amusement. Alva does not amuse us because, if he persecuted his enemies, he did so from an ordinary human motive. He was guilty of ruthlessness, not of silliness, and there is nothing to laugh at in ruthlessness. Ruthlessness is particularly odious because it is so reasonable. It is a vice of which any of us might, in certain circumstances, be guilty. Similarly, it will be generally agreed, Henry VIII would seem a much less amusing character if he had had only two wives or had executed only one. Not that it is reasonable to execute even one wife, but it does not seem so odd as to execute two. As soon as the element of oddity creeps into a man's behaviour, there is something in us which prevents us from judging him by ordinary human standards. We see him as an eccentric puppet scarcely responsible for his actions. That is why most people are amused by Wainewright's explanation that he had murdered a girl because she had such thick ankles. The inadequacy of the motive to the crime astonishes us to such a degree that it takes us outside the world of reason into the realm of absurdity. Murder on such æsthetic grounds is so remote from everything that we call experience that there is something positively funny in it. Who could take seriously a murderer who killed a man because he wore whiskers or because his boots squeaked or because he

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pronounced "father" and "farther" in the same way ?

To most people at this end of Europe, the execution of a number of men in Turkey for not wearing hats will seem an example of killing for curiously inadequate reasons. It is almost incredible that any government should think it right to take a man's life because he wore the wrong sort of head-dress. The twentieth century has invented some peculiar compulsions and prohibitions, but this, I think, is the first example of the introduction of the death-penalty in support of these novelties in legislation. There are parts of America in which it is forbidden to smoke in the streets, but no one has yet suggested that people caught smoking should be sent to the electric chair. Nor in any of those parts of the world in which drink is prohibited has it been proposed to hang, shoot, decapitate, or electrocute anyone found with a brandy-flask in his pocket. It is possible that we may yet come to this, for we are apparently entering an age of great strictness in small matters. But the execution of the six Turks at Marash and of eight others at Rizeh ought to warn us of the danger of making laws about trifles of human behaviour. It is true that the executions at Rizeh were the result of an anti-hat riot, and obviously the hat in these affairs is a political symbol and not a mere article of dress introduced for love of the latest fashion, like

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Russian boots in England. On the other hand, there was no riot at Marash, and one of the prisoners, who was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, explained that the only reason why he did not wear a hat was because he could neither beg, borrow, nor buy one in that out-of-the-way town. To send a man to gaol for ten years for not wearing a hat seems an excessive punishment in any circumstances, but to send a man to gaol for not wearing a hat in a place where it was impossible to buy a hat is so odd that it is difficult to believe that it ever took place outside a musical comedy. You may, of course, make a symbol of anything you please—of a rose, as in the wars of York and Lancaster, or of short hair, as in the Puritan Revolution, or of a cap, as in the French Revolution—and any of these things may bring a man to his death by revealing the fact that he is your mortal enemy. There is probably some element of the same kind of symbolism in the war between the hat and the fez in Turkey. But this does not make it appear any the less extravagant for a government to pass a law making the wearing of hats compulsory and enforcing it with a series of executions. There is something whimsical about it, as about the conduct of Nero.

Most of us are already slaves to fashion in our dress—and to the inhabitants of another planet even that may seem ridiculous enough—

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but we do not for some reason resent the petty tyrannies of fashion as we resent the petty tyrannies of a government. If Mr. Baldwin began to issue decrees about our ties and waistcoats and trousers, such as fashion issues from year to year, he would be driven from office within twenty-four hours. For such is the constitution of the human mind that many men would rather die than wear any article of clothing at the dictate of any other despot but fashion. Fashion, indeed, retains its despotism only because men are its voluntary slaves. If fashion surrounded itself with an army of policemen and executioners, many even of the dandies would throw off their dandyism and, wearing made-up ties as a symbol of liberty, would organize an armed revolution. Could a situation of this kind arise outside a comic opera? Twenty years ago one could have answered "No" without hesitation. To-day so oddly are many of our fellow-creatures behaving that we cannot be quite so sure.

And, indeed, is the Turkish law, ordering men to wear hats, much more extravagant than Mussolini's decree against dancing in Italy, and the Soviet Government's order to the Lenin-grad libraries to "destroy all pre-revolutionary volumes of *belles-lettres*, which are out of harmony with Communist doctrine"? It is true that dancing is not to be punished with death in Italy, and that there is no suggestion

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that a Leningrad librarian found with a novel of Sir Walter Scott's on his shelves will be shot out of hand. But there is something ludicrous in this invention of new crimes, and in the attempt to purge the world by prohibitions of things in themselves innocent. It shows a mania for interference that, if carried to its logical end, would order the detail of our lives at every hour of the day—would command us to eat this, to wear that, and to amuse ourselves in such-and-such a fashion. It is difficult enough for an ordinary man to keep the Ten Commandments. What will his life be like if the Ten are increased to ten thousand? Yet, in many parts of the world, arbitrary governments are every day inventing new compulsions and prohibitions that are as absurd as if a law were passed that we were all to dye our hair green, or to keep white mice, or to wear flannel chest-protectors. I have no such passion for liberty that I would like to see either dancing or literature put outside the range of legal interference in all circumstances; and the suppression of a pestilent dancing-hall or a pestilent book fills me with no rebellious indignation. But to suppress all public dancing in order to suppress certain evils associated with dancing, or to suppress all books with the tendency of which one does not agree, seems to me a mad way of furthering the progress of human society. Let us hope that the reports

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from Italy and Russia, and even from Turkey, are inaccurate. If they are not, they are evidence that the world is as mad as ever it was, and that the whims of rulers are just as odd to-day as they were in the days of Nero or Caligula. Future ages, no doubt, will laugh at us for these things. But let them be careful not to laugh too soon. They, too, will have invented new crimes of their own, such as buying chocolate in the afternoon, or reading Dr. Watts, or not carrying an umbrella in the rain.

It seems to me that, human nature being what it is, the comic operas of Gilbert should be made a text-book in the history-class. They tell us a great deal about our species that the ordinary historians make far too light of in their resonant prose.

XIII. On Getting Used to Wireless

IT must be confessed that we who instinctively prefer old things to new things have been born into a disturbing period of history. Scarcely have we learnt almost to tolerate one new invention, when a still newer invention follows in its wake to alarm and distress us. We have seen the rise of the motor-car, the coming of the fountain-pen, the triumph of the safety-razor, and the sky filled with aeroplanes. We have seen the gramophone and the player-piano installed in our drawing-rooms. Our floors are swept with patent carpet-sweepers; our meals are cooked in gas-stoves: and it is only men and women of the greatest will-power who can refrain from buying electric vacuum-cleaners. Gas and oil-lamps have given place to electric light; the old pull-bell has been succeeded by the little white button of the electric bell; and our houses are filled with telephones, patent coffee machines, and a host of other disagreeable novelties.

It would be going too far, perhaps, to deny that some of these inventions are useful. At the same time, they have changed the face of the world beyond recognition, so that, if Charles Dickens returned to earth and visited a modern dwelling-house, he would almost certainly

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think that he had strayed by mistake, not into a human home, but into some kind of scientific exhibition or workshop. The sentimentalist in us protests against such vast and thorough-going changes. Half the world that we knew as children is dead. And not the worse half either. Can we be expected not to mourn, for instance, as we observe the gradual disappearance of the horse, not only from the streets, but from the fields, before the march of the machines ?

Our protests, we realize, are in vain ; and I am not sure that they are even defensible except on sentimental grounds. Had I been alive in primitive times, I have no doubt that I should have looked on the new invention of writing with suspicion. It would have seemed a breach with the old ways, and a dangerous novelty. I should probably have foretold the ruin of poetry as a result, because poetry would no longer be spoken to the ear, but written for the eye with a machine called a pen.

And, if I had lived in the days of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde, with what melancholy forebodings I should have learned of the new invention of printing ! By that time I should have been an ardent believer in writing with a pen, because writing had been in existence for many centuries, and the invention of printing would have seemed a mechanical novelty that would involve the gradual disappearance of

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beautiful manuscripts. Yet, living as I do in the twentieth century, and looking back on the past, I cannot deplore the discovery of printing or wish it could be undone. All discoveries become old in time, and, therefore, good. Some day, I may even come to like the aeroplane.

As for wireless, if only I could live for another hundred years, I am sure I should end by getting used to it. I sometimes wonder whether I am not beginning to get used to it already.

If one of my friends with old-fashioned tastes calls at the house and makes disparaging remarks about the loud-speaker when I turn it on, I find myself resenting his attitude hotly. "I quite agree with you about loud-speakers in general," I tell him, "but this loud-speaker is different. As a matter of fact, a wireless expert who was here the other day said he couldn't make out how we had managed to get such perfect tone in a loud-speaker. He said that it was equal to the finest gramophone, and that it was the sort of miracle that happens only once in a thousand times and that nobody can explain."

"Oh," he says airily, "he must have been pulling your leg."

"No," I reply, "I never saw a man more in earnest. Just listen to the instrument for yourself."

"I'm listening," he declares, "and I don't like

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it. I don't like being bellowed at out of a chimney."

"It's simply prejudice," I assure him ; "silly old-fashioned prejudice. You're the sort of person who, if he had been alive in the day on which the world was created, would have protested against the whole thing as an innovation."

"But, look here," he cries, "I have often heard you saying pretty caustic things about wireless yourself. You said again and again that you would never allow the thing into your house."

"I know," I tell him, "but that was before I had a set."

"What beats me," he says, "is how you ever came to possess a set."

"It's quite simple," I explain. "I lent my house to a friend, who installed wireless without telling me about it and left it behind as a sort of keepsake."

"I shouldn't mind your valuing it as a keepsake," he declares impatiently, "I'm a sentimental man myself. But why turn it on ?"

"You don't mean to say that you expect me to keep a loud-speaker in the house—especially a loud-speaker with a tone like this one—and never to use it ? Besides, I have come rather to like it. Just listen to that chap singing 'I Attempt from Love's Sickness to Fly' !"

"Well," he says, "I must be flying, too."

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Tell me when your wireless is out of order, and I'll come round and see you again."

That is the sort of unreasonable spirit that converts me to a belief in modern inventions. I should have no objection if my friend denounced loud-speakers in general, or expressed a vague wish that wireless had never been discovered. But, after all, one must judge by results, and the result of having the only perfect loud-speaker in the world in the house is that I have already listened to many charming songs and quartets that I should otherwise have missed, as well as to a good many things that I should have liked to miss.

I have also with the aid of wireless attended evening service on Sundays with a regularity that is an example to the rising generation. In a way, I disapprove of the whole thing on principle—of wireless, I mean, not of church-going. But my objection was to the thing's being invented at all, not to its being turned to pleasant uses after it was invented. It was most unfortunate, to my mind, that Marconi discovered wireless; but, seeing that he has done so, let us make up our minds to make the best of it.

The world has, for the matter of that, survived far worse experiences than the discovery of wireless. However much you may pretend to dislike my loud-speaker, you cannot seriously maintain that it is worse than an air-raid.

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And whatever view we take of it, the great thing to remember is that, if any of us survive for another hundred years, we shall live to see somebody inventing something still more distressing.

XIV. The Bow



IF a small boy, reaching only a little above your knee, halts you in the street, or in one of the parks or open spaces of London, and asks you an inaudible question, you may be tolerably certain that he is asking you for one of three things. The greatest probability is that he wants a cigarette-picture. If not, it is a hundred to one that he wants a 'bus-ticket, or the time—sometimes, as he insists, the right time. Small boys are of all sorts—fat and thin, dark and fair, freckled and rosy, model boys and juvenile criminals—but, in their attitude to the world of grown-up strangers, they show an extraordinary similarity. Hence, when one of them addresses you, and you cannot understand what he is saying, all you have to do is to feel in your pockets and present him first with a cigarette-picture and then with a 'bus-ticket, and after that to tell him the time—it does not matter much whether it is the right time or not—in order to make sure of sending him away happy.

All rules have their exceptions, however, and even among small boys there are to be found rare freaks who will address strangers for other purposes than that of adding to their collection of cards and tickets or of learning the time

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according to Mr. Willett. One of these—sandy-haired, smutty-cheeked, inarticulate, and generally untidy—accosted me on Sunday as I was walking past the Hampstead Ponds and asked me a question that sounded unlike any question that any small boy had ever asked me before. “Please,”—so it reached my ears—“can you do a bow?” the last word rhyming with “cow.” I guessed at his meaning, and concluded that he was saying something about a boat—probably suggesting that I should climb the railings and help him to rescue a small boat from the water with my walking-stick. “A boat?” I said; “have you lost a boat?”—and I looked over to where a party of his infant friends were standing on the edge of the pond and gazing with religious earnestness into the muddy water in the hope of seeing a tiny fish moving. With his eyes fixed on my feet he stolidly repeated his question, “Please, can you do a bow?” I was about to give him a cigarette-picture and go away when he held out a foot in an old grey sandshoe and explained in an almost audible voice, “A bow on a shoe.” The lace certainly looked as if it had not been tied for years, and the lady who was with me, saying, “You know you’re no good at this sort of thing,” brushed me aside, thrust her bag into my hand, and set to work on the bow like an artist. Another small boy, passing with a large tin full of sticklebacks, paused and formed

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himself into a London crowd. He climbed the railings behind my little friend's back, and, holding on to his tin, wriggled his head round to the far side of the child's neck and gazed down, engrossed, at the uplifted foot and the bow that was coming into being. It was undeniably a beautiful bow—one of those bows that never come undone and that I myself was never able to tie till after my fortieth birthday. This being done, my little friend stood on his other foot and held out another sandshoe in which the lace was equally in need of tying. Then, without looking up, he said, "'nk you," climbed swiftly over the railings, and joined his friends where they were still staring mystically into the water.

His question, "Can you do a bow?" however, left me sunk in thought as I continued on my way towards Ken Wood. I asked myself the question, tried to face it honestly—"Can I do a bow?"—and I could not discover an answer more flattering to myself than "I can and I cannot." As I have already said, I have been able since my fortieth birthday to tie a shoelace in such a way that it will not come undone, but that is about all. Till then I was constantly being stopped in the street by kindly people of both sexes, who pointed to my feet and told me that one of my bootlaces—for we wore boots in those days—needed tying. I thanked them, but only in words, for I never

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could see what business it was of a stranger's whether my laces were tied or not. Probably I had felt the same kind of resentment as a child when I was told the right way to tie my bootlaces, for the young do not always take it in good part when nurses interrupt their day-dreams with instruction—not even with such well-meant recommendations as “Turn your toes out, Master Y.”; “Pull up your stockings, for goodness gracious sake”; “Will you stop walking in the puddles, you young ruff'in?”—all which advice, though tending to the moral welfare of the child, is at the time as unpalatable as physic. It may have been out of rebelliousness against instruction of this kind that I originally failed to learn how to tie a bow properly. Or it may merely be a mark of imbecility. If I knew of anyone else who was unable to tie his shoelaces so that they stayed tied, I should, I fancy, suspect imbecility.

Shoes, however, are a comparatively simple matter. The real difficulty with bows happens when one is going out to dine. There are men to whom tying even a dress-tie is all but second nature, but I am not one of them. If I were left to myself I should tie some kind of knot, and let appearances go hang. But relations will not permit this. Hence, when I have to dress hurriedly and there is no one in the house to help, I have to torment myself with a problem worse than any I ever found in Euclid. The

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operation of tying a bow must, I suppose, be one of the easiest things in the world, for I have known men with only the beginnings of a brain who were able to do it perfectly. There are men, however, whom the secret for ever eludes, as the secret of carving a fowl eludes others. For such there is no help in the mirror. The mirror, indeed, which knows not the right hand from the left, only adds to the confusion, and the knots become more and more tangled, the tie more and more crumpled, and the bow of one's hopes recedes further and further into the impossible. It is in vain to use force, to tug the ends violently, or to use coarse language. Here, as in the government of men, gentleness is the truest wisdom. Even I, by a process of gentleness and indomitable patience of experiment, can in the end usually produce something that will not come undone in the course of the evening. In shape it may be less like a butterfly than like a rag from a rag-bag. But it serves, and, after all I have gone through, I am in too desperate a condition to care for public opinion.

The truth is, however, I seldom tie my own tie. Rather I go about like the little boy on Hampstead Heath, looking for a being of a superior order to whom I can say, "Please, can you do a bow?" Most people, I find, can. It would not be an exaggeration, perhaps, to say that all women can. At least, I know from experience

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that two women can. Men vary. Some of them can tie a bow only round their own necks. Some of them can tie another man's tie, if they stand, not opposite him, but behind him. I have had in my time three learned men all tying my tie at the same time and making a very poor thing of it. All this suggests that we made a very grave blunder when we rejected that great Victorian invention—the made-up tie. The made-up tie came as a boon and a blessing to thousands of men, and yet we would have none of it. I am no lover of mechanical contrivances, but, if anything justified the age of invention, it was surely the made-up tie. Here was a labour-saver of labour-savers, yet instead of it we welcomed into our homes such things as carpet-sweepers, egg-beaters—not that I would speak ill of egg-beaters—and fountain-pens. And we did this knowing full well that to a considerable section of our fellow-creatures the labour of dipping a pen into an ink-pot is as nothing compared to the labour of tying a bow, and that it is as inhuman to compel a man without the bow-tying capacity to tie a bow as it is to compel a man to sing who has no voice.

Yet I sometimes wonder whether it would not be a good thing to make the tying of bows a normal part of every child's education. After all, there are not too many things that distinguish human beings from the lower animals,

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and tying knots and bows is one of them. Even the dog, which is supposed to be almost human, cannot tie a bow, and the parrot, though he can talk like a man, is no longer our rival when we stoop to tie our shoelaces. To the tying of knots and bows we owe a great part of our civilization. Without them Columbus could never have sailed to America ; we should still be clothed like savages ; and Bach would never have written music for the violin. If the art of tying knots and bows were lost, the great shops would collapse into ruin, and London as we know it come undone. Without it the cotton mills of Lancashire would never have come into being, and surgery would have remained a barbarous experiment. When man tied his first knot he made a far more revolutionary discovery than wireless. He was the herald of the civilizations of Greece and of Rome.

I trust that no ornithologist will attempt to prove that some exotic creature like the weaver-bird ties knots as cleverly as a man, and that the spider with his webs will not be produced in evidence against me. Certainly, no bird or beast or insect can tie so great a variety of knots as man—the slip-knot, the reef-knot, the running-knot, the loop-knot, the French knot, the barber's knot, granny's knot, the bowline-knot, the diamond-knot, the clove-hitch, the knot that you and I tie when we are sending off a parcel, and the dress-tie. Only man, the top of

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creation, can boast of such achievements. Hence it seems to me that, as soon as possible after he has learned to walk, every human being should be met with the question, "Can you do a bow?" and made to feel ashamed till he is able to give a satisfactory answer. Perhaps it is because we instinctively realize the immense importance of being able to "do a bow" that we have rejected the made-up tie with such contumely. We feel that we

who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spake, the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held . . .

ought at least to be able to tie a dress-tie. It is one of the bequests of civilization to us, a tradition not lightly to be thrown away; and, if it involves sacrifices on our part, what civilization was ever built up or preserved without the readiness to make sacrifices as great, or even greater, for the common good?

XV. Gold



EVEN the slowest pulse can scarcely help beating a little quicker at the news that "the sources of the gold that amazed Columbus in Panama have been found." The ancient poets and moralists with one accord deplored the discovery of gold as the cause of the corruption of the human race. They looked back to the Golden Age as an age of perfect simplicity and charity that existed before men knew that gold existed. Ever since then, Utopian idealists have played recurrently with the dream of a world in which the corrupting uses of gold have been abolished. Holding with the apostle that the love of money is the root of all evil, they have longed to banish money from human society, and have promised us a return to the simplicities of Eden if only we consent to use labour-cheques instead. The love of money, however, can hardly be got rid of by getting rid of the metallic kind of money. Since the outbreak of the war, few of us have had a gold coin in our hands or in our pockets, yet most of us are just as eager to get possession of those paper symbols that entitle us to our share—or more than our share—of food, clothes and house-room. We have grown no simpler in our lives since the gold disappeared to America,

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and the lion never looked less inclined to lie down with the lamb than he does under the present universal reign of paper. It was not gold that originally corrupted us but greed, and, till our nature has changed, we shall always be greedy of anything that gives us command over the resources of the earth and over the services of our fellows. Let sea-shells be substituted for gold and paper in the currency, and we shall immediately conceive a passion for sea-shells. A change of tokens will not lead to a change of heart. What we desire is more than our fair share of the good things of life, and any kind of currency that will bring us this will quickly become the object of our affections.

Yet gold, I think, has a peculiar charm. The fact that we who belong to the Age of Guilt were forced to call the Age of Innocence after that most precious of the metals suggests that gold is as beautiful as it is useful. Gold, they say, has only the value of scarcity, but I cannot believe that copper, however rare it was, could ever have won men's affections as the most beautiful of the metals. Fate that made gold rarer than copper also made it lovelier. It imprisoned in it the reflection of the sun and made it the colour of the most lavish of the Spring flowers. There are those who have spoken ill of yellow, and belittled it as the hue of jealousy and jaundice, but it is the yellow flowers that usher in the revival of the earth in

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April. Not that it is the best of all colours—probably, there is no best of all colours—and, indeed, despite our dependence on the sun, there are few of us who would choose yellow as our favourite colour. Perhaps, its association with ill-health prejudices us against it, and, except in March or April, not many of us take the same entrancing pleasure in it as we do in the blue of the sky or in the green of the trees and the fields. Or it may be that in the deepest part of our natures we love common things more than rare things, and therefore we love blue and green which are the colours of commonness even more than yellow which is the colour of rarity.

The delight of the eye in gold may thus be partly a delight in rarity. Philosophers who take life as it comes are immune from it, but the ordinary man who wishes to escape from the common round into a richer existence finds in the lure of gold one of the greatest of all temptations. For its sake men have become misers and murderers. Gold, though they would not know what to do with it if they had it, gives them dreams as intoxicating as the dreams of love. For gold men have suffered as Antony suffered for Cleopatra, and, perhaps, more men are capable of the love of gold than of the love of Cleopatra. A man will devote all the days of his life to the pursuit of gold, but Cleopatra can occupy only a fraction of his thoughts.

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Love is more natural than greed of gold, yet it is probable that greed of gold fills far more hours than love in the lives of civilized men. Thousands of them see no clear object in life except the acquisition of more gold. They—I mean, we—regard work principally as a means of getting gold—work which would obviously become our hobby if it were not already our doom. We sum up our year's achievements in terms of sovereigns that we are not even allowed to see, and we say that a man is worth a thousand a year or ten thousand a year as though there were no more efficient measure of success.

Nor are we greatly to be blamed for this. The pursuit of gold is forced on us, and we can no more escape from it than the hawk from his destiny of hunger. We may hide from it like hermits, and experiment in living without love or luxuries, as Thoreau did for a time. But without gold we can neither marry nor bring up children: we cannot travel or even give a meal to a friend such as a friend would care to eat. It is hunger, not greed, that first makes gold-seekers of us—hunger, too, in a world of scarcity and insecurity. In gold lies safety of a kind and the promise of plenty. The safety, no doubt, is more apparent than real, but, if we have gold, the next meal at least is as safe as anything can be on this planet. And the more gold we have the further we advance the boundaries of safety into the future. Again

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an illusion, no doubt, but men will give much for the illusion of safety.

Gold is for most of us the symbol of safety for ourselves and for our families. All our religious traditions assure us that it is a false symbol, but, pressed for gold as we are on all sides by shopkeepers, rate-collectors and tax-collectors, we do not find it easy to breathe the pure air of mysticism. What we ask is an escape from our immediate troubles, and without gold we cannot accomplish that. Hence, when we read the report of the discovery of great gold-fields, we are excited as though we had heard of the discovery of a cure for half the troubles of our race. It is as though food and clothing and houses have been found in abundance buried in the earth. I do not know whether the discovery of the gold-fields in Panama will make a single human being happier, but fancy tells us that it will, and we can easily persuade ourselves that poverty will retreat at least a little distance before this dawn of gold. One would like, indeed, enough gold to be discovered to assure every head of a household £500 a year. Economists, I suppose, would tell us that, if so much gold were discovered, it would fall in value to the level of silver, and we should all be little better off than we were before. Even in our own time the sovereign has lost half its value, and gold is not what it used to be. Why this is so, the economists can explain, but I cannot.

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The curious thing is, indeed, that, though we are all gold-seekers, not one in a thousand of us knows much more about the mysteries of gold than about the mysteries of the universe. Talk about the gold standard puzzles us scarcely less than the abstrusest theology, and bimetalism is as much beyond our grasp as the philosophy of Hegel. Our attitude to gold, though it is to some extent practical, is partly mystical. It is not for practical reasons that a man becomes a millionaire. There is no practical reason for having a million rather than a hundred thousand pounds. For practical purposes, a hundred thousand pounds is as much as any man, except a confirmed philanthropist, would know what to do with, and most of us would be content with a good deal less. But there is a mystical belief in gold that makes men with a hundred thousand pounds not content till they have added to it. This is usually attributed to a love of power, but in most cases I fancy the real reason is a mystical love of money. It is pursued as a golden key to the secret of life. In vain are we told stories of the miseries of riches and of the happiness of the peasant in his impecunious cottage. Our faith in gold is too strong to allow us to be influenced by such things. There is something in us that understands the passion of those men who in the great gold-rushes of the nineteenth century broke every commandment that it was

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possible to break in quest of gold and more gold. There is something in us that understands the crimes of the buccaneers and pirates, for they like ourselves desired gold more than the wisdom of the philosophers. If Panama turns out to be the land of gold that it is reported to be, thousands of people who could not at present point it out on the map will become interested in it as they can never be interested in Jugoslavia. The human imagination turns to gold as the sunflower to the sun. For this reason the ordinary man would rather read the life of the cruellest pirate that ever lived than of the wisest philosopher. He thinks he knows what the pirate is after, but what the philosopher is after he cannot quite make out. It will be centuries yet before a novelist can capture the imaginations of men with a new "Treasure Island," in which the treasure that good men and bad men alike go in quest of is wisdom.

XVI. The Sin of Bobbing



CURIOSITIES of belief still linger in these islands, and it would be well if some pious hand collected them before they have faded out of existence. I have no doubt there are still a few people who refuse to have their photographs taken on the ground that to take a photograph is a breach of one of the Commandments. I knew a man, when I was a child, who died unphotographed for this reason, and he was both a good man and a wise one. There are other men, I fancy, as there used to be, who believe that if you were burnt to death in a fire in a theatre, your soul would almost infallibly go to Hell. Others, again, regard it as a sin to cook food on the Sabbath. Others think it wrong to put money in a bank. Others see in Summer Time an attempt to substitute man's will for God's in measuring the courses of the sun. The custom of spraying potatoes against the blight was objected to as an interference with the Almighty's way of growing potatoes.

Not the least curious of these beliefs is that which condemns the wearing of short hair by women. Only the other day I received through the post an old-fashioned-looking tract, entitled " ' Bobbed ' Hair : Is it well-pleasing to the

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Lord ? ” And I presume that shingling and every other method of abbreviating women’s hair comes within the scope of the question. It is not without interest to reflect that to most Englishmen about three hundred years ago this very odd question would not have seemed odd at all. Or, if it had seemed odd, it would have seemed so only because it is odd to ask questions to which everybody knows the answer. We do not ask “ Is the sea wet ? ” or “ Is Great Britain an island ? ” And most of the Cromwellians, I imagine, were just as certain that it was sinful for a woman to crop her hair as they were that the sea is wet. I may be wrong, but I do not see how any man could hold any other opinion on the matter who believed in the literal and verbal inspiration of the Bible. Grant that the Bible is verbally inspired—and many great and wise men have held this—and that all its injunctions are equally binding on us ; and bobbing and shingling will have to be reckoned among the vices that destroy the souls of human beings.

It is only because most of us, including those who believe in the inspiration of the Bible, have ceased to believe in its verbal inspiration, that the question “ ‘ Bobbed ’ Hair : Is it well-pleasing to the Lord ? ” strikes us as comic. Yet there is something pathetic in the lingering of an old faith in the pages of this tract, with the solemn address of its opening sentences.

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“Will our sisters in Christ,” begins the author, “—the younger ones especially—suffer a few words of exhortation and entreaty? A new fashion has come into the world that knows not God, and many who do know Him are following it. The new fashion is called ‘bobbing’ the hair.” It is to the credit of the writer that he does not dip his pen in bitterness as the ancient prophets too often did when they approached the subject of women’s fashions. He realizes that to step aside is human, and is ready to admit that in these days many a good woman must find that she has had her hair bobbed before she has considered the consequences of her action. He writes, not to denounce, but to admonish. “No Christian,” he says, “would willingly grieve the Lord, and assuredly none would knowingly disobey His word. But ‘evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart.’” He appeals none the less earnestly to all good women to resist the spirit of the age. “The human family,” he declares, “having thrown off God, is a seething mass of restlessness and discontent (Isa. lvii. 20–21). No satisfaction can be found. Nothing pleases the mind long, so that those who cater for the world’s amusements and fashions have to keep their brains continually on the rack in order to provide something fresh. But why should Christian women fall victims to all this?” I am not learned in the history

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of bobbing, but I fancy the author of the tract is wrong in ascribing its origin to fashion-mongers whose brains were on the rack in order to provide something fresh. Fashions in clothes no doubt, are often the result of a deliberate plot on the part of dress-designers with tormented brains ; but fashions in wearing the hair, like revolutions, have deeper and more distant causes. Bobbed hair probably became inevitable on the day on which Darwin discovered an ape in man's genealogical tree. The clergy themselves brought its triumph nearer when they dabbled in the higher criticism. It is an extraordinary fact, but, as soon as the story of Jonah and the whale became incredible the long hair of woman was doomed. The orthodox of an earlier age were right. Bibliolatriy could not give way to humanism without producing consequences far beyond anything that the innovators foresaw. Sunday football, Sunday opening of picture-galleries, the omission of the word "obey" from the Marriage Service, and the universal fashion of bobbed and shingled hair, are all due in large measure to the fact that in the middle of the nineteenth century Darwin published a book called "The Origin of Species."

The author of " ' Bobbed ' Hair : Is it well-pleasing to the Lord ? " would probably brush aside "The Origin of Species" as of little account, and, indeed, most of those whose lives

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have been most profoundly influenced by it have never read it. If they had to choose between reading "The Origin of Species" and reading the Bible, ninety-nine out of a hundred of them would choose the Bible. Even so, I doubt whether they would accept it as this earnest author does, as a guide to hairdressing. "Why," he asks, "should Christian women rid themselves of their hair because misguided unconverted neighbours do it? Has God's word nothing to say concerning these things? Let us turn to 1 Cor. xi. 3-16." We smile at the simplicity of the appeal, yet to some of the greatest Englishmen in history, that reference to 1 Cor. xi. 3-16, would have been as decisive as an appeal to a House of Lords' judgment in a court of law. John Knox and John Wesley, Bunyan and Cowper, would probably have sided with the author against the easygoing theologians and women of these times. If we grant the author's premises, there is no escape from his argument. "In verse 15," he observes, "we read, 'If a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given to her for a covering.' This one passage should suffice for all who wish to please God. In woman's long hair is her glory, given to her by God: why should she cast her glory aside? In verse 6 we are told that it is 'a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven.' The new word, 'bobbed,' is only another way of saying 'shorn.'"

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The writer is mistaken in thinking that the word "bobbed" is new, though in the past it has been applied more generally to the tails of horses than to the tresses of women. His logic, however, is sound, even if he goes a little beyond the book in the passage in which he expresses a melancholy doubt as to the fate of women with bobbed hair in the hereafter. "Thus," he cries, "a 'bobbed' woman is a disgraced woman! Surely a very serious consideration for all who fear God! What will the Lord say to our sisters about this when we all stand at His judgment seat? (2 Cor. v. 10)." Well, to be frank, if I were a woman and had nothing worse on my conscience than the fact that I had had my hair bobbed, I should face the Judgment Day with a light heart. If women are to be sent to the eternal flames for a trifle of this sort, which of us can hope to be saved? I confess, when I think of all the sins I have committed, women who have never done anything worse than bob their hair seem angels in comparison. Even the severest earthly judge could scarcely forbear to smile if a woman, otherwise innocent, were brought before him with no evidence against her character but that she had bobbed her hair. And the modern Christian finds it easier to doubt the Apostle Paul than to believe in the barbarity of the Almighty.

At the same time, it is impossible not to be touched by the simple faith with which the

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author of the tract applies Scriptural precedents to the fashions of the present day. In one passage he reminds women tempted by the hairdresser of that scene in the New Testament in which the woman that was a sinner shed tears on the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. It would have been difficult to believe that anyone could find in that passage another proof of the undesirability of modern fashions in hairdressing, but our author has done this. "Where," he asks, "would our present-day defaced sisters have been in such a scene? What service could they have rendered the Lord in their unnatural condition? . . . How strangely ill at ease our poor shorn sisters would have been had they been present in the Bethany home that day!"

And so we proceed from the note of pity to the graver note of doom, as the author sums up the position as it concerns the erring women of our time. "The refusal," he says, "to utter the word 'obey' in the Marriage Service, the wearing of men's apparel when cycling, the smoking of cigarettes, and the 'bobbing' of the hair, are all indicative of one thing! God's order is everywhere flouted. Divine forbearance tolerates the growing evil for the present, but the hour of Divine intervention in judgment approaches fast. . . . 'Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies?' (Prov. xxxi. 10)." Certainly, if the

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author's interpretation of the Scriptures is correct, virtuous women are becoming scarcer daily. I fancy, however, he is unnecessarily pessimistic. There are virtuous women with bobbed or shingled hair who will probably wonder whether " ' Bobbed ' Hair : Is it well-pleasing to the Lord ? " is itself well-pleasing to the Lord. And is it ?

XVII. Mrs. Sinkins ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

THERE are tragedies in every garden, or, at least, in every garden with which I have had to do. Not that I myself am an inveterate or indeed anything but a passive gardener. Still, I never look at the garden without feeling how much better a garden it would be if I had time for gardening. This year it is the border of pinks that has failed. The pinks are in bloom, but only as tiny little single flowers, white dabbled with reddish-brown and scarcely visible. My niece, who is responsible for them, calls me out to look at them. "Don't you think it's disgraceful?" she says; "they're supposed to be Mrs. Sinkins." I had either never heard of Mrs. Sinkins or had forgotten about her, but I agreed that they were the shabbiest-looking pinks I had ever set eyes on. They looked like pinks grown by a miser, starved in their infancy and grudged even the rain of Heaven. "How do you spell 'Sinkins'?" I asked her, as I surveyed the stunted border. "S-I-N-K-I-N-S," she replied; "what else could it be?" "I'm sure there's a 'p' in it," I said; "Simpkins is usually spelt with a 'p.'" "Well, Sinkins isn't," she declared; "I can show it to you in the gardening-books. Anyhow, I'm going to

Mrs. Sinkins

the shop to complain. It's cheating." For Mrs. Sinkins, it appears, is the pink we all know and that we all grow when the flower-and-seed shop does not swindle us. "Among the named double pinks," says the first gardening-book I take up, "are one or two white varieties which are rivals to the common pink, not only in beauty but in ease of growth. Mrs. Sinkins and Her Majesty are some inches taller than the old white ; their flowers have the size and substance of the carnation with a greenish-yellow tinge in the heart of their stout, crumpled petals. Mrs. Sinkins is invaluable." How fragrant June would be if she were growing in our garden ! What a failure June seems with these starveling blossoms that are her dishonest substitutes !

If there were no other evidence, it seems to me that the flower-and-seed merchants alone would convince one of the existence of a personal Devil. There is malign mockery in the way in which they sell us seeds and plants in which all is promise and nothing is performance. Everyone who has ever gardened, even to the extent of a penny packet of seeds, knows how those radiant blooms portrayed on the cover of the packet are in reality but the skimpiest rivals of the weeds. The sinner yielding to temptation has the same foolish visions as the amateur gardener. He, too, believes in the wonderful blossoms that the Devil has promised, and, if we may trust the evidence of human history,

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goes on his way to the same disappointed end. A flower on the cover of a packet is to him a flower already grown. He does not realize that those flowers on the packet will never grow, or, at least, that they will grow only as the reward of laborious virtue. When you buy a packet of seeds, however, you expect them to grow into the likeness of the picture as if by magic. They are already in bloom for you on the day on which you purchase the packet. And the strange thing is that, although you know how delusive these hopes are, after buying packets of seeds for half a lifetime, you are the victim of the same deceptions when the next spring comes round. It is easier for the ordinary man to disbelieve in the Bible than to disbelieve in the picture on a seed-packet. He so longs for the picture to be true that he is willing for the thousandth time to give it the benefit of the doubt. Even hardened rationalists, who laugh at the notion of the whale's swallowing Jonah and at the miracle of the Red Sea, are the annual dupes of the seed-merchant, and, in presence of the picture on the packet, are no wiser than children.

It may be that I speak with a certain bitterness, for I, too, have had my hopes cheated in this fashion. Not that I ever tried to grow prize flowers, but for a short season it was my ambition to grow enormous vegetables. I took a curious pleasure in looking at photographs of

Mrs. Sinkins

French beans and in the prospect of growing French beans of the same magnitude. The picture of a great-hearted cauliflower would stir me like the sound of a trumpet, and even a cabbage in a photograph, with its outer leaves curling gently back, would seem to me as beautiful as a rose. With what energy I went out with a newly-bought spade and dug the soil of the garden to a depth of two spits, as directed in a shilling gardening-book, while waiting for the seeds to arrive! With how much greater energy I instructed my nieces and their mother and their nurse how to dig, reading aloud to them from the book and warning them not to bring the subsoil to the surface! With what zeal I warned them of the possible existence of wireworms and leatherjackets, advising them as to the best methods of distinguishing a garden pest from a gardener's friend! Then, happy day, just as the garden had been reduced to the uneasy appearance of a stormy sea, all waves and troughs of earth, the large parcel of seeds arrived and with them a bag of seed-potatoes, Scotch-grown, and guaranteed immune from wart-disease. The potato, it seems to me, save in its early infancy, is one of the most worthless of vegetables. We eat it from habit all the year round, but who would be unhappier if Raleigh had never discovered it? It is true that the potato boiled in its jacket and all flour within has its charms, and even a baked potato

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bought from a brazier in the Vauxhall Bridge Road after midnight once had a flavour that, if I am not mistaken, it has since lost. But the potato of the restaurant—and, indeed, the potato of nine cooks out of ten—is a symbol rather than a food to be eaten with active delight. It is a make-weight on the plate, a trick played on the stomach, the false coin of comestibles. Yet, somehow, whatever may be one's attitude to this fallacious vegetable, there is an extraordinary pleasure in growing it. Life is full of dreams as one reads the statistics telling how many tons of potatoes the head-gardener of the Duchess of Arran produced from half an acre of ground, and one longs to make one's garden brim over with potatoes. As one plants the Edzell Blues—one chose them for their colour—one works with a feverish joy in the prospect of teeming abundance, and one loves those potatoes of the imagination as one will never love the real potatoes on the table. Disappointment begins, indeed, long before one has dug them up. The early summer is either too dry or too wet, and, as a result, the plants have an air of senile decay or sprawl in a lanky misery of green, telling of poverty at the root. One thrusts the fork into the ground and, instead of coming on a cornucopia of tubers like those grown by the head-gardener of the Duchess of Arran, one has to dig up half a row in order to supply the needs of a single meal. One puts on

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the best face possible, and almost persuades oneself that there is a deliciousness of flavour in these potatoes grown in one's own garden with the sweat of one's brow that differentiates them from all other potatoes. One would resent a stranger's criticism of them, and longs, indeed, to hear him announcing that they are ambrosia. But, deep down, one has a disillusioned heart. They are mean and beggarly parodies of the photographs, and one knows it. The seed-catalogue has lied again.

And it is the same with peas, beans, scarlet-runners, cabbages, cauliflowers, leeks, onions, shallots, lettuces, sprouting broccoli, beetroot and radishes. The carrots suffer from the carrot-fly, the turnips from the turnip-fly, the swedes from finger-and-toe disease, and the lettuces from drought in good weather and from slugs in bad. This may be an exaggeration, for something certainly grew, but nothing grew quite like its picture, and the garden looked just like an ordinary garden in this vale of tears and not at all like a Paradise of vegetables. One ate one's leeks with a sinking heart, knowing that one could have bought better leeks at a less expense of labour and money from the greengrocer.

Still, I do not like to blame the seed-merchant too bitterly. Bad gardening may have had something to do with it, and bad soil, and bad weather, and the inextirpable pests of the

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ground. I was certainly willing to give the seed-merchant the benefit of the doubt, till my niece began to cultivate an enthusiasm for plants and flowers. Here it is not merely a case of a lying seed-packet. Her complaint is not that the flowers that come up are not equal to the pictures, but that they are different from the flowers she has ordered. She asks for blue lupins, and they come up white. She writes for mauve tulips and they come up yellow. Even the pyrus japonica that she planted so optimistically produced a strange sickly whitish-green flower. And now, as though anything could surpass the bulbs from Holland in trickery, comes the crowning mendacity of Mrs. Sinkins. Do florists know the heart-aches they disperse among the homes of these islands by their fairy-tale methods? I wish one of them would turn honest cynic, and when he posts his wares, would warn the novitiate gardener that his tulips are not what they seem and that the pinks he sends may be Mrs. Sinkins or, that, on the other hand, they may not. He should also issue a new kind of catalogue giving realistic pictures of his flowers as they grow in an ordinary garden—stunted and worm-eaten roses, Dropmore anchasas discoloured as garments that have lost their dye in the washing, ordinary clarkia, ordinary columbine, ordinary nemo-phila, ordinary everything, except Mrs. Sinkins which is not even Mrs. Sinkins. I fancy most

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of us would be content with ordinary flowers if we were not led to expect extraordinary ones, and even those little starveling pinks might serve if one had not been expecting Mrs. Sinkins. But one resents living in a world of shattered illusions. One prefers not to have pursued phantoms. We have the courage to face the truth, if only the florists will tell it to us. But to be told lies—and lies that are so inevitably proved to be lies—about Mrs. Sinkins, is more than we can bear.

XVIII. Orators



NOTHING could be more pathetic than the alarm shown by the members of the House of Commons when any member suggests that it would be a good thing to allow the B.B.C. to broadcast the proceedings of the House. It is all very well, they seem to suggest, to broadcast the noises of the Zoological Gardens or the noises made by a newspaper going to Press, but to broadcast the noises made by the House of Commons would create such a general disillusionment in regard to politics that the public would cease to treat Parliament with respect. We have no illusions about lions and tigers such as can be destroyed by hearing their voices out of the loud speaker, and illusions about linotype machines are as rare. But there has always been a genuine and extremely useful illusion about the House of Commons—an illusion that has survived the rudeness alike of Cromwell and of Carlyle. Without being conscious of it, the ordinary man thinks of a Member of Parliament as being a little larger than life. He listens to his words the more attentively, not because they are necessarily words of wisdom, but because they are the words of a Member of Parliament.

The M.P. is not merely a man but an institu-

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tion. He is wise not only with his own wisdom, but with the collective wisdom of a constituency. He is also wise with the wisdom of that great freemasonry known as the governing class. He is a ruler, a little king, a man whose voice may affect the destiny of nations. He may be personally a fool, a pompous nobody, a bleater of all but meaningless sentences. Even so, let him go down to address his constituency, and it will be odd if with the help of a good chairman and a handful of boredom-proof party men the meeting does not gradually succumb to the illusion that it is listening to the weighty pronouncement of a pillar of the State. Hear him speaking at a public banquet, and, though every one present may be wishing after the first three minutes that he would stop, there is a general feeling among those present that, at least, they are being bored by an important man. Those who hate Parliamentary institutions would like to destroy this illusion that puts a halo of interest on many a dull head, but, if the Member of Parliament loses his halo, it will almost certainly be transferred soon after to some other head equally stupid.

All government is based on the illusion that there are a number of wise men in the world. Whether you live under a Parliamentary system, a Soviet system or a Fascist system, you will be miserable unless you can pretend to yourself that your rulers are wise out of the

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common—that they are men not only of public spirit but of a kind of public wisdom. Why the Parliamentary system is preferable to all other systems in civilized countries is that it is based upon the illusion that a larger number of citizens are wise than is supposed possible under any other system. The democratic illusion, indeed, supposes, not only that Members of Parliament are wise, but that every male or female voter is wise—the second most magnificent supposition that has ever been made by and about mortal man. Parliament in a democratic country is theoretically composed of the wisest men and women chosen by a nation of wise men and women. In spite of all those long rows of unreadable volumes of Hansard, there is still enough belief in this theory of Parliament to make Parliamentary institutions workable. The House of Commons may burden us with taxes and may behave like the captain and crew of a ship who assume that, so long as they keep the ship afloat, it does not much matter whether they steer for or arrive at any port. But even so it carries on a certain tradition of security and solvency, and most Englishmen would rather pay taxes in England than dodge them in Mexico. In spite of everything, indeed—in spite of all the slums and the widespread degradation of enforced idleness—it may be doubted whether since the House of Commons first came into existence there has ever been a

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wider diffusion of well-being and the means of happiness than is to be seen in England to-day. This is partly due, I think, to the illusion that Members of Parliament are wiser than they are—an illusion that has persuaded the mass of the citizens to make use of the House of Commons instead of smashing it and putting something worse in its place. The second-best, we are often told, is the enemy of the best, but we should remember that it is also the enemy of the third-best, the fourth-best, the fifth-best, and so on down to the worst of all. If you must have an illusion, it is better to have an illusion about the second-best than about the fifth-best. An illusion about the second-best is not necessarily even a lie. It may be, in essence, a truthful perception that the second-best is the best we are likely to get in this world.

Whether broadcasting the proceedings of Parliament would destroy what remains of the general illusion about the House of Commons, it is difficult to say. A Member of Parliament standing on a platform is one thing : he interests and deceives the eye, and, in the heightened emotion of a public meeting, we read into his words more wisdom than they contain. A Member of Parliament's voice, however, heard in the peace of one's own home, with nothing magnetic to attract us in his presence and nothing electric to excite us in the mood of the

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audience, would be quite a different matter. Here he is stripped bare of all his trappings—as bare as a spirit before the Judgment Seat. He is now an actor without his theatre, without his limelight, without his costume, without even his gestures—an actor, as it were, dwindled into a reciter through a speaking-tube. Now, if you can imagine even Solomon or Socrates saying the wisest things in the world into a speaking-tube, you realize at once that the wisdom would lose something of its sparkle in transmission and would fall a little flat into the listener's ear at the other end. It would be disembodied wisdom, and wisdom, in order to delight us, needs a body as well as a soul. If wisdom itself would suffer in this fashion, how much more would dullness or foolishness! Those who listen to wireless programmes know to what a test broadcasting puts the sermons of famous preachers, and how many a sermon that would have touched and held one in a church sounds merely a vapid echo of ancient and platitudinous nothings when emitted by a loud speaker. How dull, therefore, would the dullness of an ordinary speech during an ordinary sitting of the House of Commons sound over the wireless! From what a dark and subterranean cavern of dullness those musicless maunderings would seem to rise! I fancy that, for sheer dullness, there is nothing to equal a dull sitting of the House of Commons. No

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Scottish Sabbath in the days of John Knox ever cast such an inspissated gloom over the human spirit. I have been in dull churches, in dull music-halls, at dull parties, and eaten dull meals in dull restaurants, but never anywhere have I seen dullness to equal the dullness of the House of Commons at its dullest. At the same time, while you are in the place and observing with your eye the members melting away out of the empty chamber, the very dullness is interesting because it is the dullness of a scene that has always interested your imagination. Remove the interesting scene, however, and precipitate this dullness into every other home in England day after day to an audience that cannot interrupt or express in any other fashion its disapproval of the orator, and a cry of baffled rage will go up through the land, and you may even see a march of embattled listeners from all parts of the kingdom on London, determined to pull down the Mother of Parliaments stone by stone. The House of Commons will remain an honoured national institution so long as it remains inaudible. Let the speeches in the House of Commons once become audible to the general public and its fate is sealed.

On the other hand, if the House could survive the first few years of broadcasting, the broadcasting of the speeches might in the end have good results. Members of Parliament, realizing

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that in everything they say they are addressing an audience of millions might gradually invent a new technique of speech-making and compose speeches so rich in matter and so eloquent in form that they would attract even a man sitting in a cottage on a rock on the edge of the Orkney Islands. Oratory might be reborn as a consequence, and no man would dare to speak in the House of Commons unless he had prepared for the occasion as laboriously as Demosthenes. There is, I agree, no certain evidence that a huge audience will improve oratory any more than it has improved literature. Temporarily, at least, it is probable that the hugeness of the audience has even injured literature. I think, however, that it will hardly injure oratory to the same degree. Popular books are addressed to readers who have not only the power to skip but the will to skip. Speeches, on the other hand, cannot be partly skipped by the listener as books can by the reader. You can read a book in half an hour by skipping, but the listener cannot abbreviate a speech except by ceasing to listen to it. Hence, it is the object of the speaker to hold his listener's attention more unbrokenly than is necessary for the writer. He will have to be more careful both of the logical order of his matter and of the form of his individual sentences than the writer as a rule is. As a result oratory may in the course of time cease to be the most neglected branch

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of literature, and may be restored to its ancient place on the heights of prose.

But that will be in the days of posterity. Meanwhile, can we, for the sake of posterity, bear to have the proceedings of the House of Commons broadcast into our homes ? I would do much for the sake of posterity, but not quite that. On the whole, for the sake both of ourselves and of the House of Commons, we had better leave the matter over to some future generation.

XIX. The Uses of Hate ♪ ♪ ♪

MR. KENNETH BELL has been speaking in praise of hate to the Congress of the National Union of Students at Cambridge. "Unless they hated something fairly strongly," he said, "it was very difficult to get a start in life. Christianity was not wholly but partly a religion of hate." He also added that "a spice of hate was essential to a successful career. . . . Carlyle had it, and was greater than Macaulay, the ideal uncle, who hadn't it." I am not sure that Macaulay's attitude to James II can be described as that of the ideal uncle, nor will every one agree with Mr. Bell as regards the comparative stature of Carlyle and Macaulay among historians. But Mr. Bell's paradox is none the less interesting because it happens to be supported by fallacies. It is itself a paradox which is as false as it is true. It is false if uttered in the company of the intolerant, true if uttered in the company of the tolerant. Mr. Bell addressed it to what must be in most respects one of the most tolerant audiences in the world—an audience of English undergraduates—and, as there were probably not above three per cent of professional haters present, it seems likely that in this environment the paradox was unusually true.

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There is a sense, no doubt, in which it is universally and eternally true. Every moralist believes that hatred of evil is one of the first duties of man. The man who does not hate cruelty and meanness is himself a hateful character, and we could not easily make friends with a man who had not a spice of hatred of these vices. It is true that what seems cruel to one man does not always seem cruel to another. Some people say that the Grand National is cruel to the horses, others that hunting is cruel to foxes, others that confinement is cruel to the animals in the Zoo. Humane men have defended all these things, however, and denied their cruelty, and very few people feel it their duty to hate steeplechase riders, fox hunters, or fellows of the Royal Zoological Society. If there were no dispute about the matter, however, it would be clearly the mark of a good man to hate them with all his might, or, if not to hate the men, to hate the things they do, which for some people is easier. Nor is cruelty the only form of evil which is difficult to define. There is scarcely a vice the frontier of which is not coloured as virtue on many an honest map. You may hate lying, but you will not seem to hate it to someone who draws the border-line between truth and lying in a different position from yours. You may hate murder but there are a few people who will deny that you do if you do not denounce all soldiers as murderers.

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Hence, in preaching the necessity of hatred, we must be careful to distinguish between a generous hatred of evil and a dubious hatred of what many good men do not regard as evil. There must be some kind of common sense in hatred. Who could respect the hatred of a man who had a savage hatred of Sabbath-breakers or of church-goers or of beer-drinkers or of teetotallers ? It is only worth hating the Devil's masterpieces, and the Devil's masterpieces are not to be found in any of these. All sectarian hatred is unreasonable, because those who hate the believers in another religion usually hate men who are as good as themselves. I am sure Mr. Kenneth Bell would not advise the young to cultivate sectarian hatred rather than to cultivate no hatred at all. There have been amusing examples of it, like George Borrow's hatred of the Catholic Church. But this does not delight us as a virtue : it merely makes us smile as an oddity of character.

Most of the hatreds that give us pleasure are of the same kind. We like them because we do not take them quite seriously. Dr. Johnson is often quoted in praise of the "good hater." "He hated a fool," he said of Bathurst, "he hated a rogue, and he hated a Whig. He was a very good hater." But put Dr. Johnson himself to the test and you will find that his hatred was largely make-believe. One of the most famous passages in his life is that which

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describes the interchange of courtesies between himself and John Wilkes. If he believed in hating rogues and Whigs, it was clearly his duty to hate Wilkes, who was worse than a Whig and something of a rogue into the bargain. And, if he had believed in hating fools, it may be doubted whether he would have seen so much of James Boswell, who, though he was not quite such a fool as was once thought, was enough of a fool to endear himself to those who like fools. The truth is, however, Johnson's antipathies were largely comic. We enjoy them much as we enjoy Charles Lamb's antipathy to Scotsmen and Jews. I do not think that any modern anti-Semite society would choose Charles Lamb as its patron saint. And as for the Scots, it is probable that he and Dr. Johnson are two of the most popular English writers in Scotland. Even Carlyle's hatred had comic elements in it, and when we read his abuse of his contemporaries, we find ourselves smiling as though it were for the most part a rough kind of jocularly.

Certainly hatred has produced only a small amount of serious literature. We had an orgy of hatred all over Europe during the war, but I doubt if a single memorable expression of it remains, except Lissauer's "Hymn of Hate," and even this was always appreciated as comedy by the nation that was so vigorously damned in it. The editors of "The Week-End Book"

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realized the essentially comic nature of most hatred when they included a number of "Hate Poems" in their anthology. How few of these express the passion that we have felt in the ecstatic moments of our hatred! Browning's sonnet to the dead Edward FitzGerald on discovering that FitzGerald had "thanked God" that Mrs. Browning was dead is certainly hot with hatred; but it is hatred that we cannot take very seriously to-day because, though we can understand Browning's pain, we cannot share his hate. The greatest "hate poem" in the English language is, to my mind, Pope's satire on Addison. How admirable is the poem, but how unadmirable the hatred! We do not love Pope the better for having written it, or Addison the less for having had it written about him. The satire has the beauty of perfection, but the ugliness of malice. And who could love malice that is more than mischief? Yet, without malice that is more than mischief, how can there be genuine hatred of persons? I doubt whether, either in literature or in life, anybody has ever seemed more lovable for having hated another man. I once saw two men shaking hands on the boat between Liverpool and Belfast on discovering that they both hated Mr. Bernard Shaw. But I did not believe that this was a handshake of real hate. It meant only that they were irritated by Mr. Shaw's opinions. And irrita-

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tion is but one letter in the alphabet of hatred.

Hatred, indeed, in order to be admirable, must be a passion. It must even be, as nearly as possible, an unselfish passion. Most of us have in our youth loved Hannibal because he hated Rome, and we loved him because we believed that he hated Rome, not for personal reasons, but as a good son and a good Carthaginian. The longer we live, however, the more fully we realize that hatred even of the oppressors of a nation or of the oppressors of a class is for the most part as little admirable as Pope's hatred of Addison. The more narrow-minded a man is, the more venomously he hates. The leaders of a revolution seldom hate their enemies half so bitterly as do the basest of their followers. It is probable that Mazzini's worst follower hated the Austrians ten times more bitterly than Mazzini hated them. The man who is capable of being a leader usually knows enough about human nature to know that his enemy is, like himself, largely a victim of circumstances, and it is impossible to hate a victim of circumstances.

Hatred, indeed, is the passion of men in their least philosophical and therefore in their least wise moments. International hatred, class hatred, sectarian hatred—they are all natural enough at a crisis, but what wise man has ever been able to preserve even one of them undimin-

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ished during a long life ? Apart from all other difficulties, few people have the staying power for a lifelong hatred. We can pursue an object all our lives because it attracts us, but it is not so easy to pursue it merely because it repels us. And hatred is for the most part the pursuit of what repels us. Hence, I doubt whether Mr. Bell's advice to undergraduates to cultivate hatred is likely to be of much use to them, except in so far as it means that everybody should have sufficient character to have profound sympathies and profound antipathies. And the antipathies are of value only in so far as they are the shadows cast by sympathies. The sympathies and antipathies between them give life colour instead of a common greyness. But I doubt if it is necessary to advocate the antipathies. It is like speaking in favour of greed to a glutton or of sleep to a sluggard. I have seldom met a man who had not more antipathies than were good for him. Even in the tolerant world of undergraduate England there are probably more than enough antipathies to keep life from degenerating into a good-humoured and listless boredom.

XX. On the Dresses at Ascot ∞ ∞

CENSURERS of modern civilization see a powerful argument in favour of their views in the photographs of charming women in clothes more charming still that appear in the papers during Ascot week, even while the future of the country is in danger. To them it seems intolerable that some thousands of people should be spending money lavishly on luxuries while hundreds of thousands of their fellow-citizens have not enough money to spend on the necessities of the home. A number of them regard Ascot, during the June race-meeting, as a heartless and immoral parade which should be abolished, even if no one gained a penny-worth of honest pleasure by its abolition. I do not quarrel—at least, not violently—with those who look on Ascot with disapproval, but I have no sympathy with those who would destroy so charming a spectacle through envy. Envy is, perhaps, the most deadly spiritual disease from which we human beings suffer—a far deadlier disease than the snobbish admiration at which the envious are always railing. The snob, at least, gets something out of his snobbery: he performs an imaginative act, living by proxy the glittering life of those whom he considers his betters, and enjoying himself in an innocent make-believe world of material bliss.

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Compared to the envious man, he is like a happy child playing with a toy instead of a miserable child breaking a toy to pieces.

That human beings should be envious is intelligible, but this does not mean that envy is intelligent. All the great prophets and poets have told us that there is no sense in envying any man his eminence in anything save virtue. The Greeks saw in the eminent man a man more vulnerable than the rest by the arrows of tragedy. There is nothing in the Greek drama to suggest that a human being, by becoming great, or rich, or powerful, adds to the cheerfulness of his days. Shakespeare writes in the same tradition. His kings mourn their lot as bitterly as any pauper by the roadside ever mourned his. If the Shakespearean king is envious, he is envious of those who have not the misfortune to be kings. Now, if a king in the days before limited monarchy was not a man to be envied by those who have to work for their living, we may be sure that it is still less worth while to envy a duke or a baron or a modern millionaire. It is all very well to imagine sentimentally how pleasant it must be to be a duke or a millionaire, and then to go and enjoy one's own little round of friendships and pleasures. But it is a commonplace of the moralists that, in so far as any man is happy, he owes more of his happiness to something in himself than to prosperous external circum-

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stances. If he is of a happy temper, he would be happy either as a duke or as a drayman. If he is of an unhappy temper, he may just as well be unhappy in a cottage as in a castle.

I doubt if these moral commonplaces ever obtained less credence in the civilized parts of the world than they do to-day. With every generation money seems to bulk more largely in men's thoughts. The number of rich men has steadily increased, and the number of those who would like to be rich has increased enormously. In the old days, when the churches had more power over men's minds, millions of people resigned themselves good-humouredly to the circumstances in which they were born and no envy of the prosperous ever disturbed their contentment. Not, we may admit, that this was altogether an ideal state of affairs. Contentment with a scheme of things that dooms one's children to impoverishment of body and mind may have certain happy results, but it is questionable if it is either morally or socially desirable. In presence of such contentment, one can sympathize with the rage of the revolutionist. Contentment may be the effect of mere lack of vision, and, if there is one thing of which we can be more certain than of another, it is that it is better to live imaginatively than unimaginatively. It is true that the contented poor have often enjoyed a rich imaginative life through their affections, their religion, and the

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thousand interests that are at every man's door. But it is an addition to the imaginative life to go further than this and build up in one's hopes a world of diminished suffering, of defeated dullness and ugliness, and of fuller and more widely-shared opportunities.

The agitator has at all times played a useful part in pulling down the Bastilles of contentment in which men live, and dragging us—at first against our will—into the light of a more heroic vision. Had it not been for the spirit of agitation, we should still be savages, without the arts, without comfort, without hope. There are pessimists who hold that, if we had remained savages, we should be just as happy as we are, and, indeed, there is no measuring-rod of happiness to tell us whether they are right or wrong. We believe—mystically, if not rationally—however, that it is worth while being civilized: and anyone who accepts this view is bound to feel discontented till civilization has been spread and shared among all peoples and all classes. Even the most reactionary Conservative is constantly boasting of the work his fellow-countrymen have done in helping to civilize people of a different colour from himself. Imperialism has always based its moral defence on the assumption that it is the duty of the more advanced races to civilize the less advanced. Many of the adherents of Imperialism, however, seem far more eager to civilize their black

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subjects than their white fellow-subjects. But, after all, if civilization is worth sharing, it is worth sharing, not only with the negro, but with the man in the next street.

It would obviously be unfair to suggest that no efforts have been made by white men in the last hundred years to share their civilization with other white men. All the Education Acts, the Factory Acts, the Housing Acts, are evidence of a profound general desire to civilize the white man—in other words, to give him certain of the conditions of civilization—and history will probably give the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the credit of having made an immense advance in this matter. But the advance has never been made without a great outcry and protest on the part of those who believe that the State cannot afford to have all its citizens civilized. To-day, we have the same protest from many quarters when there is a discussion on wages. We are told that we must resign ourselves to economic laws and be content with a world in which great numbers of the citizens cannot afford to bring up their children in civilized surroundings. It is possible to have the greatest respect for economic laws and yet to realize that, if we had always submitted to what were called economic laws, small children would still be working in the mines, and slavery itself would never have been abolished. There is nothing more amenable to reason than an

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economic law. It is as fragile as a glass tumbler, and, when it is broken, it is as easy to find another to take its place. Nine out of ten economic laws, indeed, are economic laws only till they are found out. When the conscience of society revolts against them, economic laws show themselves extraordinarily ready to compromise. And so, when an economic law bids us lower the standard of living—which is, in large measure, the standard of civilization—we do well to ask ourselves whether there is no way of getting round it or, at least, of interweaving it with the moral law, without too great damage to either.

At the same time, I doubt if we should be doing any service to the standard of civilization by abolishing Ascot and its luxurious pleasures. It may be picturesque for a man who wants to pull down the slums to advocate that a beginning should be made by pulling down Mayfair, but it would be possible to pull down Mayfair and to leave every slum in Hoxton still standing. On the whole, the pleasantest kind of world of which one can dream is not a world in which the superfluities of the few have been taken away from them, but a world in which the possession of superfluities has become general. This, I admit, is a simple and sentimental dream, but I know so little of science that I find it easy to believe that scientific discovery will so increase the powers of production that rich men will become as common as poor men are to-day.

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In those days, instead of thinking bitterly of Ascot, we shall all be going to Ascot, unless such things bore us—and I was grieved lately to hear three people confessing that Ascot bored them—and some of us may be clever enough to back the right horses. If we see a beautiful dress, we shall admire it, and our envy will be only a form of commendation. Frequenters of the paddock at Ascot, however, would do well in the meanwhile to realize that all this beauty of clothes and horses, of green leaves and of sunlight shining on silk hats and grass, is so charming that the more people who are brought within the enchanted circle the better it will be for everybody. The time for the perfect Ascot is not yet, but it will come all the sooner if we take it for granted as a natural event of the future. Not that there are not better things even than Ascot, but it is a small piece of the civilization that must be shared. The envy of the class-warrior is largely the result of a belief that such things will never be shared—at least, voluntarily. Whether they ever will or not I do not know. Nor do I know whether the ordinary human being will be any happier when they are. But, meanwhile, the spectacle of the lovely throng of animals on two legs and on four should convince any reasonable being of one thing at least—that a nation that can afford to keep up Ascot can afford to keep up the standard of living of ordinary men and women.

XXI. The Return ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

THERE is probably no one who is more inclined to half-believe in ghosts than the man who has never seen a ghost. I myself, I suspect, am as incapable of seeing a ghost as of painting a picture or of solving a problem in algebra. But, just as I feel tolerably sure that pictures can be painted and problems in algebra solved by other people, so I am willing to believe that ghosts have been seen by other eyes than my own. I cannot take sides passionately in these disputes about the return of the spirits of the dead. I find it as easy to believe in the existence of a ghost as in the existence of a motor-bus. There are eastern philosophers who say that the motor-bus is an illusion, and there are western philosophers who say that the ghost is an illusion, but I do not understand the distinction between illusions and real things when their existence has been sworn to by several witnesses. It is true that I have confirmed the existence of motor-buses by my own experience, while I have never conversed with a ghost. But I know people who have seen ghosts—people who themselves dislike most people who believe in ghosts and who would never have believed in ghosts unless they had met them unexpectedly on lodging-

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house stairs or on a country road. They have usually, too, been people noted for sobriety or for scepticism, and, even apart from that, my first instinct is to believe anything that I am told. I can even believe that the world is round, chiefly because everybody says that it is round. I can believe statistics about the diameter and the circumference of the earth, in spite of the fact that I know that statistics about such simple things as the coal trade or Prohibition in America are usually untrustworthy. If you are born credulous, you cannot help being credulous, and, if I am to be credulous at all, I would as soon be credulous about ghosts as about most of the things of which I read in the papers.

Hence, when an old friend whom I have not seen for half a lifetime sent me an account the other day of a conversation he had had through a medium with another old friend who died between fifteen and twenty years ago, I did not brush the story impatiently aside, but read it with as little sense of unbelief as I feel when reading "Gulliver" or "The Arabian Nights." I was more deeply moved by it, indeed, than by either of these works, because it brought back to me the face of a man that nobody could help liking as he discoursed over many glasses of whisky in public-houses that, like himself, have long since vanished and left not a wrack behind. It is a face that I should like to see

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again—a face that, as the evening wore on, used to look more and more like a harvest moon, a moon with a drooping moustache and a beautiful meaningless smile—at least, a smile that meant nothing but the universal charity of a good man near closing time. For the life of me, I can remember hardly anything he ever said, except, “No, no, old chap. I must really go home. Well, just one more. Oh, you Irish devils!” So far as I could judge, he usually began to go home some time in the afternoon, and was still going home towards midnight, always protesting, loving his kind too well to leave them untimely.

His rosy face comes back to me under the genteel disguise of a top hat. It may be an illusion of memory, but I feel sure that he was in a top hat when I first saw him. He was the editor of a paper that had seen better days—a paper devoted to the interests of those who either made or sold liquor. Temperamentally, I think, he was more suited to be the editor of the “Missionary Herald.” For he had a childish innocence, a sentimental feeling for the virtues, that were more akin to the spirit of a church meeting than to the spirit of a meeting of licensed victuallers. You would have thought that it was by an accident that he frequented public-houses rather than churches, and, indeed, I am sure he would have gone wherever his friends went. If he had a passion it was for

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the love of company. His face, when he was alone, was of the school of Heraclitus, and he spent his life in the search for company in which he might escape from himself into the mood of Democritus. Lachrymose as he sometimes looked, he had the soul of a wit, and, though he was not a witty conversationalist, he had many of the gifts of a witty writer. When I met him first, he was a member of a club of young writers and artists who met in a Holborn tavern and, after dining on beef and beer, sat down to compose verses or make drawings on some subject set by the chairman of the evening. It is the sort of task for which I have no gift, and I was all the more amazed by the facility with which Jimmy could always scribble out a sonnet or a ballade with a dexterous turn of phrase to finish it. Company excited him to do his best, and, as he rolled his lines out in his west-country brogue, you could not have asked for a prettier soap-bubble.

All the time, I think, his thoughts were on other things. What he really would have liked to write were sentimental idylls of the countryside—tales of happy or hopeless love, of villainous squires who closed rights-of-way, and of the domestic life of west-country villages. He did, indeed, finish and even publish one novel of this kind—a little stillborn novel—but he earned his living by writing leading articles for the

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publicans or whoever his employers were and by tossing off light verse and three-line jokes for the weekly papers. His reverence for literature was none the less solemnly serious. His conversation was interlarded with quotations from the poets, and, as the barman filled another glass, you were never surprised to hear Jimmy murmuring, as his rosy face approached your ear in the din of the bar :

“The world is too much with us. Late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

His voice comes back to me chiefly as that of a dispenser of quotations. He was particularly moved by those poems that represent our stay upon earth as a visit to a tavern and dwell on the fleetingness of things. He loved to break off from “No, nothing more, old chap. Well, this must be the last,” with some discussion of a literary theme—whether Charles Lamb was right in some paradoxical opinion or other, whether Browning was a greater poet than Tennyson, or whether Stephen Phillips was a poet at all. He never became heated in a debate, and, if you said to provoke him that Milton was only a minor poet, and not to be compared with W. B. Yeats, he would only shake his head benignantly and say : “I don’t agree with you, old chap,” and, leaning over his glass, would murmur, all smiles :

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Sabrina fair,

Listen where thou art sitting

Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,

In twisted braids of lilies knitting

The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair.

Listen for dear honour's sake,

Goddess of the silver lake

Listen and save !

He pronounced words like " translucent " and " amber-dropping " as if he loved them, dwelling on their flavour, and, at the end of his quotation, would ask you, with the anxious, uncertain look of a child, " Don't you really think that's great, old chap ? " Then, realizing that you had been jesting, he would shake his head at you and laugh and insist on ordering just one more. As the barman brought a fresh round of drinks, it was ten to one that Jimmy would be declaiming :

Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour.

England hath need of thee : she is a fen

Of stagnant waters.

" Of mineral waters," someone would interrupt him. " That's an excellent idea, old man," Jimmy would agree quickly. " What's wrong with modern literature is that the poets no longer give us the true, the blushful Hippocrene, but dry ginger ale."

He had, it seemed, a wife and a large family of children ; but those of us who were only his

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tavern acquaintances never met them. At the same time, you would have said that he was a born father if only he had had the gift of going home. In the end his reluctance to go home was his undoing. His paper failed, or he lost it. His health broke down. He became shabby in his dress, and walked the streets like a dismal ghost. He was a boon companion who had lost most of his companions, and, in the end, he was picked up unconscious on the pavement and carried off to die in a hospital.

And now, an old friend tells me, he has spoken from another world in the cheerful accents of his best days on earth. He has grown a beard since then, it appears, but otherwise he is unchanged. One of the questions he asked from Heaven was whether he couldn't "shift it" in the old days, and he urged his friend to go and dip into "a little of the old life." "It would warm you up," he declared genially. Well, if Jimmy is a ghost, I am sure he often walks in Fleet Street, and looks dubiously on a world that has been transformed by all sorts of licensing restrictions that make it easier to go home than it used to be. How melancholy he must be if he ever makes a pilgrimage to Mill Hill on a Saturday afternoon, to find the once hospitable doors of the inns closed against him! Not that I think the round moon of his face would cease to shine even in a world that was given over to tea. He

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was happy in company—almost in anybody's company—and, though he had two or three close friends, asked little more of life than to sit round a table and argue about anything or nothing, in the company of men who wrote. He could "shift it," it is true, but that was not what primarily distinguished him from other men. One thinks of him chiefly as a benevolent moon of good fellowship that has vanished, as a lingering disciple of the poets of the past, as a sentimentalist always doing his best to go home but with only partial success. May he find fewer temptations where he is gone! May he meet many companions to whom he can recall with all that rosy tenderness of his how he used to be able to shift it in the great days on earth!

XXII. On Being Lord So-and-So

ONE of the most interesting features of the General Strike was the way in which peers and peers' sons and daughters suddenly became once more the wonderful creatures they used to be in the days of Ouida and the "Family Herald Supplement." Small though the newspapers were, they could still find room for paragraphs telling us how Lord Swish was a guard on an electric train, Lord Swash was helping in running a canteen in Hyde Park, and the Hon. Gwendolen Swush was driving a motor-car or distributing the morning papers. During the Boer War Mr. Kipling had ranged "duke's son, cook's son, son of a belted earl" as equals in presence of the grim facts of life, but during the General Strike cook's son became suspect as a sympathizer with Bolshevism, and duke's son was restored to his ancient pedestal as a national hero. In one paper we were told that Lord This had shown a wonderful genius for making tea in a canteen, and that Lady That had surprised everybody by her marvellous gift for making sandwiches. Apparently, during the past twenty years, a theory had been spreading that the British Peerage was a collection of imbeciles, and the discovery that peers and their sons and daughters could actually

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do the sort of things that any of us could do came as a startling revelation to the gossip-writers and the gossip-readers of London.

I confess I have never had so poor an opinion of the Peerage that I could be surprised by the discovery of facts of this kind. I have known intimately peers of two kinds—the peers that one meets in novels and the peers that one meets in books of reminiscences—and never for a moment had it occurred to me that they were beings incapable of making a cup of tea or cutting a ham sandwich. I knew that, if peers did not as a rule brew their own tea, it was for exactly the same reason that I myself do not brew my own tea. It was because other people did it for them. But making a pot of tea is in itself the easiest thing in the world. Even a peer knows that you must heat the pot before putting in the tea, and that you must put in at least a spoonful of tea for each person and a spoonful, as they say, for the pot. These things are not mysteries, but are known to children. As for cutting sandwiches, even a peeress must know that the ham should be approached, not with the blunt but with the sharp edge of the knife. In cutting sandwiches there is no distinction between an emperor and a boot-black, except that the emperor, being more fastidious, is likely to cut thinner slices.

The truth is, a peer can do almost anything that an ordinary man can do. Until fairly

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recently he could not make a political speech during an election ; but, a few years ago, even this disability was removed, and to-day a peer is at liberty to do almost anything he pleases, from writing poetry to running a milk-shop. It is true that, as a rule, he does not write very good poetry. One of the most puzzling things in history is, if I may be forgiven the alliteration, the paucity of the poetry of the Peerage. The peer, I suppose, has too few troubles in life to be able to write very good poetry. The poets, as a rule, have been miserable men, even when they have had private means. Many of them have owed a great deal to the fact that they were not able to marry the woman they wished to marry ; while a peer, however undesirable in other respects, is almost invariably able to marry the woman he wishes to marry. Without unhappy love, however, poetry loses one of its greatest themes. Peers, no doubt, have been unhappily married, but a peer needs to be almost excessively unhappy, like Lord Byron, in order to write poetry. If he is amorous, he is more likely to suffer from satiety than from dearth, and it is out of dearth that poetry is born.

The chief trouble of a peer's life, indeed, must be that he has a narrower range of experience than the ordinary man. He has experience of riches without experience of poverty—experience of success without experience of

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failure. And it is doubtful if even experience of riches and success is as intense among those who have experienced nothing else as among those who have also experienced poverty and failure. There is little romance in wealth to those who have been born wealthy and whose families have been wealthy for generations. The country in which wealth is most romantic to-day is the United States of America, and this is because so many American millionaires began life as paupers. It is difficult to believe that there were ever enough paupers in America to have provided that vast population of millionaires that exists to-day; but it is undoubtedly the background of poverty more than anything else that makes the millionaires interesting. As we read about them we feel that even we might have become millionaires (as Wordsworth might have written the plays of Shakespeare) if we had had the mind. Their experiences are in most respects like our own, as we take part in the eternal struggle to make money. But a peer, like a monarch, seems to stand above and outside everyday experience. He has never had to struggle for the things for which we have had to struggle. That, I fancy, is why so many people are surprised to learn that, if put to it, he is sufficiently like ourselves to be able to make a pot of tea or cut a sandwich.

It is an odd fact that the English peer, though

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he has been shorn of most of his privileges, has been allowed to retain almost all his glamour as a superhuman figure. It is clear from the newspapers that, even in an age of super-tax, a peer remains as generally attractive a figure as he was in the days of the novelettes. He is a kind of dream-figure—a figure suggesting a world in which work is unnecessary, and wealth and travel and pleasure can be had by rubbing a lamp, and life is a noble game from morning till bed-time. Ordinary men and women are accused of snobbishness because of the interest they take in the doings of people of title. But this interest, I think, is evidence of simplicity rather than of snobbishness. The doings of the Peerage provide many honest people with an English equivalent of the “Arabian Nights.” If all these pleasures of which they read are materialistic, so are the pleasures of the “Arabian Nights.” In each we have a world of jewels, treasure and happy appetites. Prospero’s wand could summon up no more entrancing vision for thousands of simple people than did the notes of the ordinary gossip-writer telling of the behaviour of peers and their sons and their daughters during the General Strike.

Whether this will always be so, it is difficult to say. The human mind craves for faith in some superhuman figure. Even the atheist, who disbelieves in God, is usually not above

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being impressed by a duke, and we find ardent republicans like Benjamin Franklin boasting of their wide acquaintance among kings. There was a rumour some time ago that in Soviet Russia there was a movement to suppress fairy tales with their recurrent princes and princesses. I do not know whether it was true, but, if it was, it showed an extraordinary ignorance of the constitution of the human mind. It is not snobbery that makes children love princes and princesses. It is rather the desire to believe in the existence of some superior order of beings—masters of fate, immune from circumstance, free from the helplessness, the needs, and the prosaic troubles of ordinary life. If we abolish princes and princesses from the fairy tales, be sure they will come back under some other name. They will become commissars or shop stewards, or have some other dignity that will raise them above the need of making their own tea or cutting their own sandwiches.

Hence I cannot say that one of the ruling passions of my life is the abolition of the Peerage. The peer in politics may be a nuisance, but the peer in paragraphs is one of the most amiable characters in popular fiction. There he is always a good fellow, genial, smiling, and capable of making a pot of tea if he has to. In private life he is probably very like other people, cross if he is kept waiting in a restaurant, a man whose blood boils as he reads the speech of

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a political opponent in the morning paper, complaining about the weather, disappointed in his new clothes, with strong views about the split infinitive, able to drive a car, interested in cricket, gloomy if he has backed a series of losing horses, attending meetings that he does not wish to attend, eager to escape from life into a good detective story, and glad to go to bed before midnight. But, *qua* peer, he is above all these things—a wonderful person who, if he dips into common life, can do all the things that common people can do, and can take our breath away by the skill with which he (who is born above such things) can make tea, cut sandwiches, wave a flag in a railway station, and sell newspapers.

XXIII. The Telephone ∞ ∞ ∞

IT is said to be just fifty years since the first telephone was introduced into England. Has the telephone, I wonder, during those fifty years, been the object of more blessings or comminations ? Would Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor, if he returned to earth to-day, be hailed as a public benefactor or mobbed as a public nuisance ? Certainly, it is rare to hear anybody speaking well of the telephone. There is less enthusiasm for it, perhaps, than for any other modern invention the use of which is so widespread. Human beings are divided into two camps about wireless, but the eulogists of wireless are as enthusiastic as they are numerous. Motor-cars are still the occasion of hatred in many breasts, but these are more than counterbalanced by the thousands of people who regard motoring as a pleasure for poets to sing about. Painters and poets have celebrated even trains and trams. Gramophones have their devotees, and typewriters are generally defended on the ground of their utility. But where is a body of citizens to be found who, when someone in the course of conversation mentions the telephone, become the panegyrists of that great invention, and rejoice as they ought in the possession of an instrument that gives them powers unknown to Alexander or to Cæsar ?

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I confess I do not like this crabbed way of accepting the gifts of the gods. It was open to us as a race to reject the gift of the telephone—to say firmly that we did not wish to talk to, or to be talked to by, people a mile or a hundred miles away—that there was already too much foolish talk at close quarters without adding to it all the foolish talk of which people at a distance were capable. There is always a fairly strong argument against any new invention in the fact that hitherto the world has got on tolerably well without it and that it is not at all certain that the human race is going to be an ounce the happier as a result of it. We might, indeed, have found half-a-dozen good reasons for refusing to have anything to do with the telephone. Human beings, however, are seldom conservative when it comes to the test. They are experimentalists to whom every novelty seems for a short time as delightful as a toy. And to the voice of the experimentalists in favour of the telephone was added the voice of the business-men, who seem always to take the view that any new invention must be good if it is good for business. Thus the protest that might have killed the telephone at its birth was never made. We accepted the new instrument—which was certainly in its way a remarkable invention—and it seems to me ungenerous to go about denouncing it now as a pest and a plague, as though it had spread

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against the will of the population, like the rabbit in Australia.

Nothing could be more marked than the difference in the attitude of the ordinary human being to the postman's knock and to the telephone-bell. For some strange reason, many people live in the constant hope of receiving pleasant messages by post. Bills, income-tax demands, appeals for charities, and money-lenders' circulars may day after day fill their letter-box. But they harbour no resentment against the postman on that account. They have a burning faith in the ideal letter, even if it never comes. It may, according to the temperament of the individual, contain money or childish cross-shaped kisses or the laughing gossip of a friend. It is said that thousands of people never quite lose the hope—however little warranted—that one day a letter will come to them through the post, enriching them for the rest of their days. How many people have ever had their hopes raised in this fashion by the ringing of a telephone-bell? Our instinctive response to the postman's knock is one of welcome, but to the telephone-bell is one of hostility. This seems all the more difficult to understand since all the unpleasant things I have named come by post and there is as yet no way of sending bills by telephone.

Probably, it is the insolence of the telephone

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that chiefly accounts for our hostility. The postman's knock is peremptory enough, but he does not insist that we shall there and then leave whatever we are doing and postpone everything else to the duty of reading the letters he has delivered. If we are in bed when he calls, he permits us to stay there. If we are in the middle of dinner, he does not order us to leave the table and attend to him while the chicken is growing cold on the plate. The postman, whatever his faults—and he has several—is a gentleman. He does not intrude upon our privacy, or make his way into company where he is not wanted. Compare with this courtesy the insolence of the telephone. The telephone is like a stranger who forces his way into your house and will not go away until he is satisfied that you are not at home. The telephone takes it for granted that it has the right to break in on you at any hour of the day. It does not care whether you are sleeping or eating or working. It claims priority of treatment above all your employments, and gives a false sense of urgency to the most trivial message. I do not know whether there is any sure means by which a man can defend himself against the bogus urgency of telephone-calls. Many people use secretaries, clerks and servants as a first line of defence, but the ordinary man is easily lured into talking over the telephone to people to whom he would not have time to talk face

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to face. Mr. J. M. Keynes some years ago wrote a letter to the Press suggesting the necessity of a strict etiquette in the use of the telephone. He contended, unless I am mistaken, that a call over the telephone at an unseasonable hour is just as ill-mannered as to call on anyone in person at an unseasonable hour. It seems to me that everybody should have a definite telephone-hour, which could be given in the telephone-directory, and that no one except for the most urgent reasons should feel justified in ringing him up except during that hour. I am not sure, indeed, that any but urgent messages should be permitted over the telephone at any hour. It should be an instrument of business, not of torture.

The unpopularity of the telephone is also due in part to its untrustworthiness. You never know when you may be given a wrong number or when you yourself may be somebody else's wrong number. It is not that one is exasperated by the waste of one's time that results from this. It is rather that one has been put in a false position, as if one had walked into a stranger's house. It is embarrassing for a sensitive man to enter a stranger's house, even by telephone. He feels as apologetic as if the man whom he was wronging were standing before him. It is odd that he should care two-pence for the feelings of a man whom he is never likely to see and who will never know his

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name, or should mind putting an unknown person to the most trifling of inconveniences. But human relations are never more emotional than over the telephone wire. Hatred and anger from an unknown voice infuriate us ; courtesy, as it coos from the receiver into the ear, mollifies us. It would be impossible to exaggerate the contribution that the "Sorry you have been troubled" of the telephone-girl has made to the good-humour of England. So powerful is the influence of the human voice over the wire that it is easy to believe the story of the servile employee who, on going to the telephone with his hat tilted boastfully and finding that his titled employer was addressing him, took off his hat and remained bare-headed during the conversation.

I confess, however, I can forgive the telephone for almost anything except for its occasional failure at a crisis. I am not one of those who believe that the telephone-service is inefficient. I believe, indeed, that it is amazingly efficient. But a lazy or incompetent operator may bring down a rain of comminations on the entire service. Some years ago I had to ring for a hospital nurse in the small hours of the morning. I was told, after waiting a few minutes, that there was no answer. After two or three attempts to get through I was told that the nurse's telephone was out of order, and that it was impossible to get through. I persisted,

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however, assuring the operator that it was a matter of life-and-death importance, and that the nurse had given me the number on that very afternoon, and in a few moments the connection was made without any further difficulty. In such circumstances, is it stupidity or indolence or the natural resentment of the operator at being disturbed in the small hours that is to blame? It would be well if there were some emergency button on every telephone which would send a special signal to the operator at a crisis and attract his immediate attention. The worst of it is that everybody would use the emergency button on all occasions, and the man with a real emergency-call to put through would in the end find himself in as difficult a position as ever.

Whatever may be said in dispraise of the telephone, however, there are few of us who would willingly be without it. There would be few more difficult forms of self-denial for a man who is accustomed to having a telephone in his house than to order the telephone to be taken away. Without a telephone, he would feel at times as though he were marooned on a desert island. His telephone puts him within a few moments' distance of friends, business, shops, amusements. With a telephone at his side, he can lie in bed, like a Sultan, and issue orders, and his orders will be attended to more quickly in the great shops than if he went there

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in person. To him the telephone is the equivalent of an army of messengers. He can achieve more with it than a Persian monarch with a retinue of runners. It is as efficient and as marvellous as a pair of Seven-League Boots, and who in his senses would refuse a pair of Seven-League Boots? As to what the effect of the telephone has been on the happiness of the human race, it seems to me probable that we are just as happy since its invention as we were before. It is the greatest nuisance among conveniences, the greatest convenience among nuisances. That—when you remember some of the things man has invented—is fairly high praise.

XXIV. Lunch ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

LUNCH—or, as the purists call it, luncheon—is the meal that above all others puts a man to the test. (The purists, by the way, seem to have little enough reason for objecting to “lunch” as a vulgar abbreviation. There was a word “lunch”—“perhaps evolved from ‘lump,’” according to the dictionary—in existence as long ago as the sixteenth century. It meant “a piece, a thick piece; a hunch or hunk,” and men spoke of cutting bread into little lunches. It was not used so early as “luncheon” as the name of a meal, but it began to displace “luncheon” in the reign of George the Fourth. “The word ‘lunch,’” says a book of 1829, “is adopted in that ‘glass of fashion,’ Almacks, and ‘luncheon’ is avoided as unsuitable to the polished society there exhibited.” Even though it may have been an affectation of fashionable speech in 1829, however, “lunch” is obviously not a vulgar curtailment comparable to “photo” or to the “as soon as poss.” of the house-agent. It is in itself just as good a word as “luncheon,” and, even if it were not, it is a word that has been given its certificate of citizenship by the general consent of all classes of English society. All these facts I have just learned from the “Oxford Dictionary.”)

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Lunch, then—for it would be pedantry and a waste of ink to write the longer word—is, I contend, the meal that above all others puts a man's character to the test. A man may eat a large breakfast without being a glutton, and a small breakfast without being an ascetic. He may eat a large dinner without being a glutton, though, if he eats a small dinner, he is probably either an ascetic or a slave obeying his doctor's orders. But if he eats a large lunch day after day when he is lunching alone, you can be almost certain that he is too fond of food, and that you have discovered his ruling passion. He must, of course, be lunching alone in order that you can judge him fairly. You can judge no man by the amount that he eats or drinks in company. For, under the genial influence of other people's company, many men eat and drink more than is good for them. A man who sits down to lunch with another man cannot be accused of eating for the sake of his appetite. He goes on eating in a kind of mystical mood, never pausing to ask himself whether all these dishes are doing him any good or giving him any pleasure. His absorption of food is spiritual rather than physical. He would never dream of ordering for himself the courses that he permits to be ordered for him by his friend, or that his friend accepts from him.

We see this curious principle at work especially on the occasion of public lunches. It can

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scarcely be denied that the ordinary man eats at least twice as much at a public lunch as he would eat if he were lunching alone at a restaurant. This is not greed, but communion. Eating is the game of the moment, just as talking is ; and eating is twice as easy when we do it to an accompaniment of talk. We were told recently at a lunch given in honour of the memory of Brillat-Savarin that the meal was not meant to be a luxurious affair, but that it was light and simple in accordance with Brillat-Savarin's theory of taste at the table. This may have been true enough from the point of view of a gourmet, but I am sure I ate as much at it as I should have eaten in the course of three days' lunches if I had been lunching alone. The eggs and truffles alone would have served me for a meal in Fleet Street. Or that memorable capon. The prospect of eating a similar light and simple meal in the middle of every day of the year would fill me with alarm, and I should shrink from it as from a long spell of overwork or over-exercise. But it is sweet to dissipate in a place, as the schoolboy said, and an occasional spell of over-eating, like an occasional spell of overwork, exhilarates us. And even the three wines. How many men would dream of a sequence of three wines if they were lunching in solitude ? The lack of money would prevent most of us from doing this in any case, but I am sure that, even if I

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were a millionaire, I should be content with a single wine, or with beer, or even—at that hour of the day—with coffee, if there were no one else present to turn the meal into a ceremony.

Eating and drinking, indeed, may constitute either a meal or a celebration, and the moralist must make a sharp distinction between the two. If I were reading that excellent paper, the "Guardian," for instance, by myself in a Fleet Street coffee shop, I could enjoy it to the accompaniment of a haddock and a roll-and-butter. Not that I have any passion for haddocks, but that they are easy to obtain quickly and to eat quickly—matters that are of more interest to me when I am alone than any exquisiteness of cookery or flavour. On the whole, I think, I dislike haddocks, but I usually forget that I dislike them till I have ordered one. How resentful I should have been, however, if the proprietors of the "Guardian" had attempted to fob me off with a haddock and a roll-and-butter at that noble lunch which was given at the Fishmongers' Hall to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the paper! Even in the Fishmongers' Hall such a dish would have seemed scurvy and inappropriate to the occasion. For the fishmonger can provide a better dish than that, and we sat down in that large company of bishops and other churchmen to a rite of salmon, followed by roast mutton and roast capon such as would have made one think

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better of the best paper in England. Do not think that we over-ate. Speaking for myself, I can say that I ate between twice and three times as much as I should have eaten in a Fleet Street coffee-shop ; but, just because we ate mystically, and not from greed, we rose from the table without any feeling of self-reproach, and without that sense of physical injury that many of us would have, if we ate more than two dishes without the presence of a fellow-creature to inspire and excuse us.

It seems to me probable that we shall go on celebrating great occasions with lunches and dinners of many courses as long as there is anything on earth left to celebrate. There is no other comparable means of celebration known to man. Even if you were celebrating the centenary of a saint famous for his austerities, you would find it a cold and formal business if there were not plenty to eat and drink. You warm to the memory of a virtuous man as you sit in good company round a table, as you could never warm to it in the chill atmosphere of a Pantheon. And the food and drink must be worthy of the man whom you commemorate. This is no occasion for a boiled egg, or for hake, or for beef sausages. To eat these things in a man's memory would be to insult him in his tomb. It is not for the sake of the guests, but for the sake of the man or the event in whose honour the banquet is given,

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that the food and wine on such an occasion must be good. I could lunch happily on a kipper when alone, but I could not lunch happily on a kipper in honour of Shakespeare. The kipper, I should feel, was good enough for me, but not good enough for Shakespeare. This may seem to some people to be an absurd symbolism, but, without symbolism, who could fully enjoy eating even a Christmas dinner? These extra dishes mean no more than the waving of hats when a winning try is scored at an international Rugby match. It may be perfectly absurd for human beings to express their pleasure by taking their hats off and waving them; but we must take human beings as we find them, and admit that this is one of the traditional means by which they express their joy on a great occasion.

As for eating too much for its own sake, that is another matter. As it does not happen to be one of my vices, I cannot condemn it too strongly. It seems to me to be the least worthy of all forms of excess. And, indeed, the majority of men seem to think so, too, for in a wicked world I am sure it is one of the rarest forms of wickedness. The doctors are always telling us that we eat too much, but I fancy that they mean only that we eat a little too much, and I do not call a man a glutton unless he eats much too much—unless, indeed, he eats much too much when he is alone. Most of the people

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who fall into the hands of the doctors are people who eat too much at parties and in the company of friends, and that, as I have explained, is not gluttony. The ordinary man gets comparatively little pleasure from food as food. He eats just enough for his own sake, and a little more than enough for the sake of others. If he loved food for itself alone, he would have written more poems to it, but how small the book would be that was devoted to the poetry of eating ! Man at his own table is a natural utilitarian who is as little likely to over-eat as a well-behaved cow. Few solitaries have been gluttons. The lives of the hermits do not, I believe, contain the record of a single gourmet. Let man go into company, however, and his appetite increases. Two men who are individually indifferent to food begin to find themselves enjoying it when they sit down to it together. It is as though a sort of over-soul had come into existence with a new palate and a new appetite. Hence it is wrong to describe as " beastly " the over-eating of which the doctors complain. The beast eats as much when it is alone as when it eats in company. All is for appetite, nothing for ceremony. Man alone is a ritualist in his eating, who eats to satisfy, not only the cravings of nature, but the cravings of good-nature.

XXV. The Triangle



LORD OXFORD, speaking at the award of the Hawthornden Prize as a hardened playgoer, confessed that he "had become heartily sick of the stale and monotonous reproductions of the sex problem with its triangles, its complexes, its more or less thinly disguised indecencies, both of language and situation." Thirty or forty years ago many people believed that the stage and literature were about to be revived by what was called a frank treatment of the sex problem. Yet now that we have had more than a generation of frankness, we are wearily turning back to Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope. We have realized that the eternal triangle can be just as boring as the family circle. And, indeed, when the eternal triangle became the eternal rhombus, and threatened to become the eternal pentagon, hexagon or even heptagon, we found that with the addition of each fresh angle sex in literature became less and less interesting.

It would be absurd, of course, to suggest that sex itself is not interesting. One might as well say that food is uninteresting. But we should very quickly get tired if the majority of plays and novels were about the food-passion of men and women without discrimination or taste.

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A little food here and there improves almost any story, and no writer knew better than Dickens how important it was to give his characters plenty to eat and drink. But he also knew better than to make any of his principal characters men or women who were totally devoid of interest apart from their greed of food. If you can create an interesting character in fiction, you may make him a glutton or a drunkard or anything you please. It is he that makes the gluttony and drunkenness interesting rather than they that make him interesting. It is true that in comedy something may be done with gluttony and drunkenness as the leading qualities of a character, for gluttony, drunkenness, or almost any vice may be made fun of in itself. But in tragic or sentimental literature we demand character, as well as characteristics, and, even though we know that drunkenness and gluttony are the cause of many tragedies, we should be bored by their repeated introduction into drama and fiction, unless the drunkard or the glutton were a man for whom we had some liking.

Some day there may arise a school of gluttonous fiction, which will give us a long series of gluttons as heroes and heroines. We shall be shown gluttony leading to indigestion, indigestion leading to ill-temper and quarrels that break up the home, and then—in the more sentimental examples of the school—there will be

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a passionate scene in which the wife calls in a silver-haired doctor who persuades her husband to wean himself from lobster with apples, and by the end of a year sunshine will reign in the home and the children and the cat will live happily ever after.

Many people may think that the rise of such a school of literature is improbable. But I am sure an extremely fascinating novel could be written about indigestion. How magnificently gloomy it would be, surpassing the deepest midnights of Ibsen and Dostoevsky! How detailed an analysis we could be given—in the person of the hero or heroine—of the psychological effects of indigestion? We should have dyspeptic Juliets speaking to dyspeptic Romeos with exasperation from the balcony, and we should see the course of true love roughened by indigestion in its manifold forms. Great characters, otherwise flawless, would be brought low by it. Coriolanuses would be driven to evil, not by pride, but by heartburn. The first few novels of the school, I think, would be read with a lively curiosity. But, when the publishers began to turn them out by the hundred, and we became over-familiar with scenes of eating and recovery from the effects of eating, we should become as weary of the fiction of food as Lord Oxford is of the drama of sex. We should cry out for characters instead of appetites. "Give us characters,"

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we should plead, "whatever their virtues or vices. Back to Homer and Shakespeare, Sterne and Jane Austen. We can forgive anything but your attempt to substitute appetites for human beings."

It seems to me that the "stale and monotonous reproduction of the sex problem," against which Lord Oxford protests, is the result of an attempt to found a sexual school of fiction analogous to the gluttonous school of fiction that has been outlined. Those who dislike the greater part of the drama and fiction of sex do so, not because they wish all the characters in imaginative literature to behave with perfect propriety, but because they find themselves continually being asked to interest themselves in the sexual affairs of people who are not interesting and who do not—in an imaginative sense—even exist. Helen, Cleopatra and Guinevere were all hypotenuses in wrong-angled triangles, but even the most Puritanical of readers do not propose to banish them from literature. There can be no tragedy unless someone behaves badly, and without sins the dramatists and novelists would be hard put to it to earn a living. But, as we read the great stories of the world, we do not feel that the story-tellers are drawing dull triangles on blackboards for us; the interest of the triangles is always subordinated to the interest of the human beings.

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Who but a schoolmaster could love a triangle for itself alone ? I cannot say that I positively hate triangles, but I can honestly say that I am indifferent to them. One of the first triangles in which I ever took a serious interest was known as—or, at least, was a figure in—the pons asinorum, and I fancy that the triangle of the pons asinorum is the eternal triangle about which most of the sex novelists and dramatists write. They present us with the sexual situations of supremely uninteresting people, imagining that so long as they give us a triangle of some kind they have performed the whole duty of an author.

Occasionally their books have a certain psychological interest, though for the most part the psychology that we find in the fiction of sex is a sham psychology. The authors write as they do, not because they know a great deal about human nature, but because they know very little about it. They appeal, not to the imagination, but to one of the cheaper kinds of curiosity—a curiosity that goes after every will-o'-the-wisp in the desolate bogs of Freud. They are popular to-day largely because a certain kind of curiosity, which was supposed to be suppressed in the nineteenth century, is no longer suppressed, and also because they do crudely discuss the problems that are perplexing many people in an age in which the imperatives of the old religion and the old morality are no

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longer accepted so generally as they used to be. It used to be supposed that it was the "young miss" who was responsible for the milk-and-water nature of the trashiest kind of Victorian literature. I fancy that it is still more the "young miss," now turned inquisitive, who is responsible for the present popularity of the triangle.

The interest in the fiction of sex is largely an ethical, not a literary interest. It is an interest in problems of conduct among those who have begun to doubt whether those problems were all really solved by their Christian ancestors. A great many of the writers on sex are mere propagandists. Their novels are tracts in favour of a gospel of the right to certain kinds of experience, and, from a literary point of view, they are just as dull as the thousands of tracts that have been written on the other side. It is unlikely that they will have any lasting popularity, because people after all do not read novels or go to the theatre in order to be preached at. What we want most of all in novels or plays is to find good company, and it is generally true that men and women are never worse company than when they are engaged in an attempt to square the eternal triangle. Who ever loved a man in real life merely because he was in love with somebody else's wife? One's dearest friend may be a man who is in love with somebody else's wife, but it is the man we

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love, and not his love-affair. We are interested in his love-affair because we are interested in him. The dull amours of a dull man would interest the imagination as little as the affairs of "Cupid's footpads" in Piccadilly.

Some of the dramatists and novelists fail to realize that what every writer of imagination does to us is to introduce us to new acquaintances and that it is his business to delight us with the feeling that we are meeting people who are worth meeting. He invites us to a party containing men and women of all characters and of all classes—Othello and Mr. Pickwick, Falstaff and Elizabeth Bennet, Electra and Becky Sharp, Long John Silver and Don Quixote. There is no exclusiveness here on any ground except that the person excluded is a bad guest. Most of the modern novelists and dramatists of sex have invited us to parties at which the characters have been eminently bad guests. Those who are tired of them object, not to the character of the characters, but to the characters themselves.

XXVI. The Dean ∩ ∩ ∩ ∩

DEAN INGE, everybody agrees, is one of the most interesting figures in contemporary England. He is a man with a mind who speaks his mind. He is a man with ideals who obviously does his best to put his opinions to the test of the real. He is not content to say "God is love" in a vague way and to feel that, having said this, he has done all that a man can do to dissolve the troubles of mankind. He is the enemy of windy sentimentalities. He does not care a row of pins for Justice or Faith or Hope or Charity, if they are only woolly words spelt with capital letters. The sentimentalist delights in capital letters; Dean Inge always brings us back to the question what the word really means when it begins with the minuscule of ordinary life. He believes with John Morley that even if great thoughts come from the heart, it is better that they should emerge through the head. Such a man, it seems to me, performs an extremely useful function in society. He is the man who, if we go to a railway station and ask for a cheap ticket for Utopia, comes up to us and whispers in our ear, "Don't be a fool." He knows that, for all most of the Utopians have ever achieved, they might as well, instead of taking their

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impracticable tickets, have remained in the station, sleeping on a bench and dreaming a long dream over the racing edition of an evening paper. Theologically, he may be willing to ask the question, "How can we get to Heaven?" : as a politician and an inhabitant of the earth, he is much more interested in the question, "How can we make the best of Purgatory?" He believes in civilization in this world and salvation in the next, and he scarcely even understands the point of view of anyone who would like to see salvation in both. To him the impossibilist is the enemy of the best possible. Dean Inge stands, like Saturn disguised as an ironical note of exclamation, at the narrow gateway through which all dreams and ideals and sentiments must pass on their way into reality. He undoubtedly tries to intimidate even dreams that ought to be allowed through. But he at least deserves praise as a Devil's advocate or challenger, who will not allow any gas-filled oddity to go past merely because it happens to be labelled "Ideal."

Unfortunately, those who make a habit of suspecting ideals are just as liable to become the victims of error as those to whom ideals are part of their daily diet. Realism in the past has made as many mistakes as idealism. People who don't believe in the New Jerusalem wander as blindly into bogs as people who do. Scepticism has as often been refuted by experience as

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sentimentalism. Dean Inge, in defending the civilization that we at present possess against the idealists, is defending a civilization that has largely been built up by idealists. In attacking the Bishops and other Christians who have been doing their best to persuade the Prime Minister to apply something like Christian principles in the settlement of the coal war, Dean Inge is attacking the sort of man as a result of whose labours English children, even in the city slums, are in this year of grace wearing ribbons in their hair and pretty frocks and boots instead of being turned into prematurely-aged beasts of burden in the factories, shops and mines. It is true that agnostics and others as well as Christians played their part in improving the education, the housing, and the working conditions of the poor, and that the rebelliousness of the poor themselves also played a large and legitimate part; but who can deny that one of the great motive forces that have made the lot of the poor tolerable, and the lot of the rich less a reproach and disgrace, during the last century was the spirit of Christianity applied, not merely in personal life, but in politics?

Dean Inge's article, "Interfering Parsons," in the "Sunday Express," indeed, appears to be written on the assumption that the nineteenth century never existed. He is never tired of denouncing us for belittling the great Victorians, but he forgets that the great thing about the

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great Victorians was that the best of them were a sort of interfering parsons even when they were laymen. Who could have been more parsonlike than the Earl of Shaftesbury? "He had," we are told, "great pleasure in the Young Men's Christian Association," and "the Church Missionary Society, as well as the missionary societies of Nonconformists, found in him a most ardent friend." Like the various Bishops and clergymen who intervened in the coal dispute, he was, however, one of that body of "incorrigible sentimentalists" (in Dean Inge's phrase) "who will not listen to the plainest facts of political economy." Shaftesbury saw with horror what havoc the plain facts of political economy, with no incorrigible sentimentalist to interfere with them, were playing with the lives of little children in the mines. "Children, sometimes not over four or five years of age, were found toiling in the dark, in some cases so long as eighteen hours a day, dragged from bed at four o'clock in the morning, and so utterly wearied out that instruction, either on weekdays or Sundays, was utterly out of the question. Often they were attached by chain and girdle to trucks, which they had to drag on all fours through the workings to the shaft." In the name of political economy the mineowners made their fortunes by means of this kind, which even Dean Inge would scarcely defend to-day. If they were abolished in the

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'forties of the nineteenth century, it was because that incorrigible sentimentalist, Lord Shaftesbury, scattered the facts of political economy into flight with the magic of the spirit of Christ.

The facts of political economy, as interpreted by the possessing classes, were bulwarks against every change that, I imagine, makes the nineteenth century seem noble to Dean Inge to-day. It was an age of incorrigible sentimentalists at war with incorrigible political economists, and, if children in England to-day are happier than they were a hundred years ago, it is because on so many occasions the incorrigible sentimentalists won. There was an incorrigible sentimentalist named Charles Dickens, who put off the embroidered robes of the artist in order to attack cruelty in the workhouse, the shop, the factory and the school. "Can all our troubles be cured by warm hearts," asks Dean Inge, "or do we need cool heads as well?" To Dickens such a question would have been almost meaningless. He saw no essential opposition between a warm heart and a cool head. He certainly did not wait until his head was feeling cool before pouring out the warmth of his heart in pity and indignation. He clearly took the view, indeed, that unless a man had a warm heart, it did not much matter whether he had a head at all. If a warm heart is no substitute for a cool head, it is equally true that a cool head is no substitute for a warm

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heart. And, if a man has a warm heart why on earth should it be a crime to let it influence his politics ?

If there are better homes, better dinner-tables, better schools, better workshops, even better prisons and lunatic asylums and hospitals than there used to be, it is largely owing to the fact that warm-heartedness refused again and again to be intimidated by old-fashioned political economy. Who knows what tortures the warm heart of John Howard in the eighteenth century may have spared unhappy prisoners in succeeding generations ? The abolition of slavery may seem a trifle to men with cool heads, but the warm-hearted still hold the name of a sort of interfering parson called Wilberforce in respect because he believed that the liberty of human beings was more important than money. The sweated women in the factories and in the little rooms where they sewed the garments of the well-to-do—see the incorrigible sentimentalist, Thomas Hood—lived long under the benign rule of hard-hearted men with cool heads till warm-hearted men with any sort of heads came along and rescued them. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,” quotes Dean Inge, and it is a great and true saying ; but is it the retort that Dean Inge would have made to Charles Dickens and Thomas Hood ?

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I fancy that, if the "interfering parsons" had only lived in the reign of Queen Victoria instead of in the reign of King George V, Dean Inge would now be holding them up to us as types of the moral grandeur that used to exist before the decadence of our own times. I doubt if he would then have seen in them "some obvious time-servers, who will have their reward when the Socialists come into power," "incorrigible sentimentalists," "the new type of parson, sprung from the ranks and soured by poverty and thwarted social ambition," and "a large class who, finding their people bored with religion, and perhaps not having much to say on that subject themselves, gladly escape to politics in which they see so much more excitement and actuality." I confess I am as reluctant as anybody to believe that my fellow-men are angels. But what evidence has Dean Inge that these interfering parsons are more socially ambitious than the parsons who have written to "The Times" in defence of the Government, or that any of them has neglected any of his duties as a parson or a pastor in order to express the opinion that justice and mercy are divine attributes, and that men, being made in the image of God, ought to do all in their power to show something of the divine nature even in their politics? After all, the interfering parsons have proposed nothing revolutionary. They have proposed nothing

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more than that that incorrigible sentimentalist, Mr. Baldwin, should put his speeches on industrial goodwill into practice. The nineteenth century has already established in various land and other reforms the principle that society has the right, if private property is used in such a way as to lead to the impoverishment of great masses of human beings, to step in and to defend the rights of the poor against the incompetence of the rich. It is not necessary to agree with Mr. Cook in order to feel that it is a shameful thing for the State not to do all in its power to see that the mines are run in such a way that the miners and their wives and their children will be given a fair chance in life and be prevented from sinking back to a pre-Christian level of food, warmth and shelter. Materialism? Well, it is as materialistic as making the blind see and the lame walk. It is little short of blasphemy, unless it is proved that no remedy is possible, to say to men whose homes are threatened: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." You might as well say it to a hungry child. But what ordinary Christian father would ever dream of asking his child to choose between the Kingdom of God and its dinner, or of suggesting that it was not possible for it to have both?

XXVII. Cultivating the Will ∞ ∞

JUST before leaving London for a holiday, I received a book with an attractive title in gold letters, "Marvels of Will Power," and, as I have often wished to discover the secret of a powerful will, I put the book into my pocket and decided to read it some morning as I lay in bed after breakfast. There is no pleasanter day-dream than the dream of possessing a strong will. The man with a strong will always gets his way, like a spoilt child. He compels people either to shut or to open the windows in railway carriages just as he pleases. He pushes his way past you in the post office and gets attended to first. If he dislikes a dish in a restaurant, he makes the waiter take it away and bring him a better one. Wherever he goes, he always gets the best things at the cheapest price. He has such a capacity for making people miserable that everybody treats him like a demigod in order to be quit of him. Who has not aspired to be such a man ? How many of us, on the other hand, are capable of the prolonged self-sacrifice without which we can never hope to be he ? I confess that, apart from the capacity for occasionally making other people miserable, I have none of the qualifications of the great man. Hence I never see a

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book about the secrets of the will without wondering whether here at last is the key that will open the door for me into a new and lordlier life.

At the very outset of this "series of home studies in self-development," the author gives us ten examples of "great men of dominant will." He begins with Alexander the Great, who "wished to conquer the world and did so." That certainly seems good enough to begin with. It is true that I do not wish to conquer the world: in fact, I should particularly dislike conquering the world. I would rather be a bricklayer, or a farmer, or a publican, or almost anything. Still, every man to his taste, and if it was Alexander's hobby to conquer the world, it is interesting to know how he contrived to do it. On this point we are told: "Alexander had that type of will—the greatest known: 'The Will to be, and do,' which is thoroughly explained to you in Lesson Five." Julius Cæsar comes next on the list—Julius who "was the father of western civilization." Well, if I were forced to choose, I would rather be the father of western civilization than conquer the world, but I should not much like to be the father of western civilization. Julius Cæsar, I am afraid, must, as the father of western civilization, frequently turn in his grave. The third great "man of indomitable will" is Oliver Cromwell, who "should be an inspiration to the man who is over forty, because the battle of Edgehill was

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fought when Cromwell was forty-three, and it was years later that Cromwell reached the zenith of his power." Here again I am in a difficulty. I am a man over forty, and wish to be inspired, but I do not wish—at least, I am almost sure that I don't—to be a second Oliver Cromwell. As for Napoleon who comes next and who "mastered men and the world because of his WILL," rather than be he I would carry a tray of Brighton rock along the Brighton front and sell it to nursemaids and children. The author of "Marvels of Will Power" seems to realize that, even as an exponent of will power, Napoleon was not ultimately a success. "You will find," he declares, "if you study his life thoroughly that time and again, when faced with a crisis, his will force won the day, until the time when he met a man of Persistent Will (Wellington) who dominated and overthrew his dynamic will." Clearly Napoleon had not studied Lesson Five. If he had, he too would have been a man of Persistent Will, and the Battle of Waterloo would have ended in a draw. Yet this man who made the astonishing blunder of forgetting to cultivate his Persistent Will while cultivating his dynamic will is held up to us as a model by the author of "Marvels of Will Power," who appeals to us in the excitement of his emotion: "If you have never read the 'Life of Napoleon,' promise to read one every year."

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As for the other six on the list—Chatham, Disraeli, Balzac, Arkwright, Kitchener and Lord Fisher—they were all admirable men, but we who are genuinely ambitious cannot be expected to be satisfied with such modest achievements as theirs. We do not read books on will power in order to become Chathams or Kitcheners or even Balzacs. We are idealists who have hitched our wagons to at least seven stars. We want to be as good as St. Francis of Assisi, to write as well as Shakespeare or (if that is impossible), say, as Homer, to be as rich as Andrew Carnegie, to be able to do without things like Thoreau, to be as long-lived as Methusaleh, as noble as Mazzini, and as practical as Abraham Lincoln, to be country curates who know all about birds like Gilbert White, to be able to leap into a gulf like Curtius (if that was the person), to preach like Savonarola and to drink and to talk like Falstaff—to be, in short, a kind of soldier-saint-clergyman-ornithologist-tavern-haunting-idealistic-commonsense-millionaire-ascetic-Epicurean-Stoic-long-lived man of the world who can get attended to quickly in restaurants and tea-shops. Can the author of “Marvels of Will Power” teach us the secret of becoming such a man as that?

Shall I obtain help, for instance, if I follow the instructions contained in the chapter called “King Will and His Counsellors”? In this chapter the author bids me :

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Write out a command like this : " I promise I will get Action. I will think overnight and will write down five things that I will get Action on the morrow. I feel myself growing in Action as I write. My power for Action will grow greatly all this week." Use this command for a week. If possible, write it out three times. Carry one in your watch-pocket, paste one up at your home, and the other up in the office or your place of business. If unable to paste up the written command, paste up the word ACTION.

Heaven knows that, if I thought I could come nearer being St. Francis Shakespeare Carnegie Savonarola Methuselah Lincoln Falstaff Gilbert White Cato Bounderby by pasting up the word ACTION on the wall of my office, I should risk even the derision of my assistant and do it. And, if anybody could persuade me to do it, I am sure the author of " Marvels of Will Power " could. For he is one of those people who, in his own phrase, not merely keep on but keep on keeping on. And he especially keeps on keeping on advising us to paste up this key word ACTION. In the chapter called " Action—the Key Word to Will Power " he writes :

Write up the word ACTION in your office if you can. In order to give freshness to the word, write it up in a different-coloured ink every month. Then write the word ACTION on a slip of paper, and paste it on the looking-glass which you use when shaving, and note the result. Thus you will come to understand something of the magic and power of the greatest word of words—ACTION.

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Could anything more ironical have happened to a man than to read a book of this kind on a seaside holiday ? If I write up the word ACTION in different-coloured inks on the walls of the house in which I am staying, the owner of the house will probably sue me for damages ; and, as for pasting it on the looking-glass, the looking-glass in my bedroom does not tilt backwards and is hung so low that I have to go into another room to shave ; and I take it that there is no virtue in pasting the word ACTION on somebody else's looking-glass.

Luckily, however, there are some things a man can do to strengthen his will even during a holiday. For instance, as the author of "Marvels of Will Power" powerfully puts it : "Pull the abdomen in, and push the chest out." If possible at all, that ought to be as possible on the coast as in London. And on the next page we have another saying, the truth of which is equally ubiquitous :

Do you think right ? Have you ever tried sticking your chin up in the air, when you are depressed and doleful ? Try it, and think cheerful, uplifting thoughts at the same time, and you will think HEALTH.

That, at least, is simple enough, though the tilt of the chin is to me unnatural. But on one of these starry nights it ought not to be beyond the power of an ordinary holiday-maker to pull his abdomen in, push his chest out, stick his

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chin up in the air, and think as many cheerful, uplifting thoughts as the situation permits.

Equally easy is it to perform the six exercises in dynamic will "to be performed daily except Sunday." The first day's exercise, for instance, is: "Memorize a verse of poetry which has reference to Will Power." Immediately there spring to the mind those admirable lines, once sung by that man of hesitant will, R. G. Knowles:

There was I in the Y.M.C.A.,
Singing just like a lark,
"Oh, there's no place like home, but—
I'm afraid to go home in the dark."

Those lines obviously raise one of the oldest problems of Will Power. If the hero of the song had practised his exercises daily except Sunday, he would not, I feel confident, have been afraid to go home in the dark. If he had pasted the word ACTION on his looking-glass, he would have been able to tear himself away even from the Y.M.C.A. at closing time. As the author of "Marvels of Will Power" says, however, most people suffer from either one or both diseases of the will, Hyperboulia and Aboulia. The man who was afraid to go home in the dark was, I fear, suffering from Aboulia.

If you are afflicted with Aboulia, what is wrong with you is lack of concentration. The man in the song from which I have just quoted

The Little Angel

could not concentrate his faculties on the thought of going home, and the result was, as he told his wife in the morning, he had to spend the night in the Y.M.C.A. Had he but read "Marvels of Will Power," he might easily with the help of a few regular exercises have overcome this difficulty. For example :

A good exercise for concentration is to take a word you do not understand (see Exercises), and master as many of its synonyms as you can. Memorize the meaning of the word, and get to know all you can about the word. Say it aloud, write it out, write it backwards, and spend fifteen minutes a day over each word for a month, and you will then have twenty-five new words for your vocabulary.

Had the late-sitter at the Y.M.C.A. but known of this, what a different man he might have been ! Instead of giving in to his fears of the dark, he might have taken down a dictionary and looked up "palinbiogenesis," or "proteroskotophobia," or "anakataperipolyphloisboiothallasismus," and have forgotten all his troubles in spelling the word backwards. As for me, alas, I have not brought a dictionary with me. I seldom take a dictionary with me on holidays, and must be content with such exercises in the book as need no learned apparatus. The two that I like best are :

If there is a word that you particularly wish to remember
SEE it in your mind's eye in raging letters of red fire across
the horizon ;

Cultivating the Will

and—

Memorize a command like this: "I am growing a strong Will; I am strong on action (or restraint); I am living in the world of big things. I am succeeding; I am more powerful; I am a dominant man, exercising domination in my sphere."

By the time I have learnt this by heart, I trust that waiters and my nieces will both find me intolerable. Alexander the Great will have to look to his laurels, and, if the Duke of Wellington were not already dead, I should challenge him to fight the Battle of Waterloo over again.

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